

Power Must Rest in the Body

Stereotypes, Disability, Reproduction and Rhetorical Tools

in *My Year of Meats* by Ruth L. Ozeki
and *Geek Love* by Katherine Dunn

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A Thesis Presented to

the Department for Literature, Area Studies and European Languages

University of Oslo

In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the MA Degree

Spring Term 2011

Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a very interesting project, which I have had great pleasure in doing. It has been an honour to dedicate more than a year to doing research and writing about these two very interesting authors and their novels.

First of all, I wish to thank Associate Professor Rebecca Scherr at ILOS for her inspirational and interesting classes, and for her patient feedback and guidance.

Henrik, you have given me inspiration and been critical and questioning. Thank you for your ideas and comments, and for always backing me up.

I would like to thank my parents, Grete and Jon, for reading my chapters and for your support. To my friends and my brother, Tone and Eva: thank you for your kindness and encouragement, and your helpful comments.

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Introduction

Power Must Rest in the Body

What greater gift could you offer your children than an inherent ability to earn a living just by being themselves? [... Al and Lily] began experimenting with illicit and prescription drugs, insecticides, and eventually radioisotopes. My mother developed a complex dependency on various drugs during this process, but she didn't mind. Relying on Papa's ingenuity to keep her supplied, Lily seemed to view her addiction as a minor by-product of their creative collaboration (Dunn, *Geek Love* 7).

[Akiko] watched the television screen, where a sturdy American wife held an economy-sized plastic bottle of Coca-Cola upside down over a roasting pan. The woman smiled broadly at Akiko, who automatically smiled back. (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 19).

The heading, which is also the title of this thesis, is quoted from Catherine Wynne's article "Crossing the Border. The Post-Colonial Carnival in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*." Its implications will in many ways be at the centre of the discussion at hand in this thesis, which sets out to explore concepts of disability, stereotypes, reproduction and rhetorical tools in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* and Ruth L. Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*. Wynne states that "power, however, must rest in her body" (152). I have chosen to modify the statement to a more general expression: "Power must rest in the body." Bodies are central in the two novels at hand, as the characters negotiate power structures, and are controlled by others through their bodies. In this seemingly easy and logical statement lies an array of meanings concerning body control, and the ways in which women and people from other oppressed groups are (un)able to control their own bodies, how they are used, and for what purpose. The quote suggests that when people are unable to control their own bodies, they are rendered helpless and with little power over their own life and future. That power must rest in the body implies that the body is a space onto which power can be asserted by others. At the same time, power can be found within the body itself. Consequently, the body is a twofold concept, which is open for manipulations from outside forces, at the same time as power can be gained for an individual through the body. In other words, the body becomes the most important face of both the ability to oppress others and the ability to voice individual needs. Therefore, being empowered in the body implies having power over one's life. Body control is crucial if a person shall be able to define herself as an individual, a concept that the two novels mirror in their discussion of the female characters and how they attempt to negotiate their destinies in

the cultural environments in which they live. At the core of the concept of body control and power are Susan Bordo's explorations, in the book *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, of the idea that the body is the person's home. A person rests within the body she is given, and a prerequisite for being in control over her own life is that she has control over her body. This includes being able to make personal decisions concerning education, way of life, medical treatments and reproduction. The quote from Dunn's novel underlines that in her fictional world, bodies are used as means to an end, and therefore the characters have little or no power over their own bodies. In similar ways are the women who are presented as the "American Wife," rendered as mediated versions of themselves. The women who are portrayed as American Wives have no control over these images, at the same time as the female audience in Japan is meant to embrace them as their own way of life.

Throughout history, human beings have defined themselves and each other according to what they are, how they should be and, importantly, what they are not and should not be. Therefore, I propose that stereotypes and normative rules for human appearance can be seen to establish the basis for cultures and bonds between human beings. To be allowed to affiliate yourself with certain groups, you must follow the norms and standards which form the stereotypes that define and mark the members of the group in question. Group creation is therefore based on stereotypes. Furthermore, creating groups can also function as a way of creating stereotypes. Group affiliation and stereotypical definitions of human beings have both been positive and negative forces throughout history. Ranging from pseudo-scientific testing of different "human races," the exclusion and eradication of different groups in regimes like Nazi-Germany, to the ways in which women have been said to be different from, and contrasted to men, the urge to define and conclude the value of human beings based on normative stereotypes has proven to be a game of cultural and political power over the centuries.

Being able to affiliate yourself with a group can be powerful and a positive force for the people within the specific group. According to some scholars in disability studies, those who are defined as disabled in a society have relied on a group affiliation which is based on their difference. To be able to fit in, they must be different, creating another normative description as the basis for *their* group. Group affiliation and stereotyping can therefore both be empowering and limiting, depending on whether a person finds herself outside of a group or inside of it. Whether group affiliation is empowering or subjugating is also a question of where the group stands in relation to the majority society and those who are part of (the)

larger, majority group(s). In the two novels, group constructs and definitions of human beings according to stereotypes are present to a great degree. Group affiliation to those who are similar as oneself becomes both a way to control others and to control oneself, I propose, in the two fictional worlds.

Kristine M. Baber and Katherine R. Allen state in their book *Women and Families. Feminist Reconstructions* that “[t]he oppression of women results from a complex system of structures, processes, relations, and ideologies, not just from men's control over women” (7), a comment I propose points to the group functions and use of stereotypes that I described above. Central to my thesis will be how cultural definitions of human beings as stereotypes affect whether or not people are given an individual voice. Having a voice is, I argue, based on the ability to control one's own body; voice will be underlined in this thesis as a way to power. Body control is therefore either an empowering or vicious circle; if the control lies in other hands than those who belong to the individual in question, the individual who inhabits the body will be unable to establish a voice and hence, her individuality. Contrastingly, by speaking and being heard, people are recognised as acting human beings and individuals, not just functioning bodies. Oppression becomes a game of stereotypes and rhetorical tools that define these stereotypes. As a result, individual voices can prove to be a powerful force when it comes to affecting the systems that define norms. Further, individual voices can also call for a change in how individuals are grouped and defined within given structures.

In this thesis I will discuss how rhetorical tools have an active role in the creation of stereotypes, in addition to how rhetorical tools can function in ways that redefine and change the outlook on people who differ from the norm and appear as deviant. Both the novels that are up for discussion present worlds that rely on stories and rhetorical tools to define the cultural systems within them. As a result, the stereotypes that are defined within these cultures are also based on stories and rhetorical tools. The female characters that are affected negatively by stereotypes are therefore affected by stories and fictions. Having a voice and establishing rhetorical tools that redefine the structures that surround the female characters will therefore prove to be crucial for their identities, body control and individualities. Since both authors have created worlds that rely on rhetorical tools to strengthen and grow, both Dunn and Ozeki point to, I propose rhetorical tools and story telling as important and founding forces in societies. As a result, the authors are critical towards relying fully on the stories that are told, as, during the course of the novels, these are revealed as more or less fluid and relative.

Ruth L. Ozeki is an American author and filmmaker, raised in New Haven, Connecticut by an American father and Japanese mother. She has gained wide appraisal for her novels and films (<http://www.ruthozeki.com/about/biography> Jan 2, 2011). Her first novel, *My Year of Meats* (1998) is about an American-Japanese woman, Jane, who defines herself as polysexual and polyracial (*My Year of Meats* 9), she does not quite fit in. Jane works in television as a researcher and later as director of a television show meant to promote American beef in Japan. The show is sponsored by the American company Beef-Ex. The background for this campaign is the ban on importing American beef to Europe, because of the high hormone levels accumulated in livestock during production. The television show Jane works on is called *My American Wife!* and becomes crucial in the novel; it is meant to portray a specific vision of American women to a female, Japanese audience. This vision includes a limiting set of stereotypes that reduces the American Woman to the American Wife, stay-at-home mum, with a handsome husband, making wholesome beef dinners for her family. The problem with this vision is that only a few of the women Jane finds actually match the stereotype. Furthermore, Jane attempts to make her own vision of what the American woman is, a vision which is different from Beef-Ex's. As a result, I propose that Ozeki presents how women are, on a daily basis, defined and limited by the stereotypes they are presented with. How women can become truly individual, with their personality and bodily security intact is one of the main questions Ozeki poses in her narrative.

Many of the female characters in Ozeki's novel are affected by disorder and disease, and I propose in my thesis that the vision of the "American Wife," as it is portrayed by the TV-show is limiting and disabling for women in general. I will focus on the central characters Jane and Akiko in my thesis because both characters' bodies are directly affected by disorder and disease. Jane is pre-disposed for cancer, has twisted fallopian tubes, and defines herself as "polysexual" and "polyracial," different than the set standards. Consequently, Ozeki's protagonist questions, through her physical body, the rules that define both women and men, ethnicity and cultural affiliation. The discussion concerning Jane's identity grows into encompassing more women and their struggles in the development of her project, *My American Wife!*, and in Ozeki's novel in general.

Katherine Dunn lives and works in Oregon and *Geek Love* (1983) is her third novel (Preface to *Geek Love*). The novel is focused on an American family, where the father's line of work is closely linked with his family. The Binewski family has always owned and run the Binewski carnival, a touring show. In a period of hard economic times, Al Binewski, the father, decides to breed his own freak show, so that his children can work and make money in

the carnival, in power of their “freakish” bodies. The siblings are Arturo the Aqua-Boy, Elly and Iphy the Siamese, singing twins, Olympia the hunchback, albino dwarf and Fortunato, or Chick, who looks normal but is telekinetic. Al Binewski and his wife Lily have managed to create a world where their children defined as “normal,” and the normal are freaky. As a result, Dunn provides a satirical view on the stereotypes that are created in everyday America. For the Binewski family the “norms” are disgusting, while they, the “freaks,” are truly individual and special, each one created with his or her own specific purpose. *Geek Love* is therefore an ironic image of how stereotypes are formed and how norms apply to people within specific cultures. By presenting such a widely different image of the norm than what is found in real life, Dunn's novel, through its satire, gives a somewhat bleak outlook on the ways in which cultures define what are considered as positive and negative factors in human beings, tying these concepts closely with the ability to earn money by using your own body. Dunn's characters are in some ways engaged in prostitution.

Interestingly, the female characters in the novel are preoccupied with their own reproductive abilities. A show employee states that having periods “happens to every female.” ‘Yeah? Well, it changes things for us. It throws in a lot of new stuff to think about” (136). This concern in the female characters places motherhood as a central theme in the novel, pointing to both the ability to earn money in power of one's own body and more importantly, I propose, for the ability to reconceptualise an individual identity within the realm of stereotypes. Similarly, in Ozeki's novel, reproduction is at the core of the struggles many of the female characters face. Reproduction and body control are therefore closely linked in the thematic structure of both novels.

Ozeki present a variety of women in her text, ranging from the independent and multi-ethnic Jane, the main protagonist and narrator of the text, via the American housewives presented in *My American Wife!*, to Akiko, wife of Joichi Ueno from the company Beef-Ex, and home maker in Tokyo. Ozeki has formed a world of women who are present in the text, but although they are present, they are only to a small degree acting as individuals in the world of the text. Akiko is surrounded by invisible women in her neighbourhood in Japan, hearing “someone's wife” (*My Year of Meats* 61) beating the carpets from the balcony, and someone's mother following her child to the playground (61). Jane, on the other side of the Pacific, is surrounded by women on her everlasting hunt for the American Wives that are to be portrayed on the show. I propose that the way women are used as background is symbolised by the process of making the TV-show. Making the show takes days, but the women are only given a little space of time on the TV-screen. They are to very little extent given voice in the

commercialised process of marketing American beef. In addition to the female characters that Ozeki presents to the reader as part of the show, are all the others, who are not mentioned, but create the background for the Year of Meats itself: the fifty-two women who prepare their meat and are showcased in Japan on Saturday mornings. Based on this I would argue that Ozeki's novel is based on a platform of women, who are present but not seen or really noticed. These female characters make up a platform from which the male characters, and Jane, can act. For, in contrast with the more or less passive women who are being recorded on tape, are the men, led on by Jane and Joichi, who make the Wives' faces forever present on the screen; they are active participants filming the passive female characters.

Similarly, a large number of the characters in Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* are women. In the carnival are the Binewski mother Lily, the three sisters Olympia, Iphy and Elly and the bunch of redheads. The redheads are women who work on the show and their uniform is red hair, a standard met either by dyeing the hair or by wearing a red wig. Still it is a man, Al who is the "grandest ringmaster" (4), and a man, Arturo, who is the greatest show attraction. Lily, Olympia and the redheads act only as helpers in the male carnival. Although Lily has been an important factor in creating the show by giving birth to the children, she is in very little power to decide and control the carnival on a day-to-day basis. As in *My Year of Meats*, I propose that Lily, Olympia and the redheads form a female basis for the male characters to act upon. Even the twin sisters, who function as more active characters within the show structure, are nonetheless controlled by the male characters throughout the course of the novel, instead of acting on their own terms.

As a result, both novels depict worlds where women are great in numbers but small in terms of power. They are presented as important, if not vital to the system in which they live, but they have the function of pieces in a puzzle instead of being active individuals. Therefore, both novels offer, I propose, a view on the oppression of women and other minor groups as a part of a systematic construct of standardised groups and stereotypes, as opposed to an individually focused culture. One of the main oppressive factors is not giving women a voice in which they can speak for themselves as independent actors and voice their individual needs. Within the masculine dialogue that is presented in the two novels, women are only to little extent given the chance to voice their own views. Both Dunn and Ozeki present female characters that need to look beyond the dialogue in which they find themselves to be able to establish their own individual voices. By contrast, the rhetorical milieus in both novels are reaffirmed because the female characters in many ways adopt these forms of expression and recreate themselves as the given stereotypes. It follows therefore that the women are still

rendered as invisible, passive actors behind a veil of cultural rhetorical tools. Finding new ways of expression is therefore vitally important for both Dunn's and Ozeki's female characters, both to envision themselves as individuals and for being active parts of different groups.

Linking up to the title of this thesis, both Ruth Ozeki and Katherine Dunn present characters in their books that in many ways are hindered from gaining power over their bodies. At the same time, they see solutions through and define their individualities based on aspects that are connected to their bodies. Therefore, the characters' struggles underline the importance of having control over one's own body and how it is used. As they focus on themes like disability, reproduction and violence, both novels bring up issues concerned with body control and body manipulation that are closely connected with being able to develop and use an individual voice. In both texts, oppression of different sorts is visible, either on the upfront level or more subtly. Nevertheless, the oppression and violence are, I propose, based on a set of stereotypes and normative definitions concerning bodies and individual human expressions. Consequently, my argument is that central to both novels are discussions concerning aspects related to cultural normativity and stereotypes. Both narratives question how these stereotypes shape, adjust and determine the lives of those who do not necessarily fit the given standards, but try to conform to them. Trying to squeeze themselves into the limits of the stereotype becomes the sad destiny for many of the characters in the two novels, where different forms of violence, both self-inflicted and executed by others, become the main tools for fitting in. In questioning these events, I argue that Dunn and Ozeki also attempt to answer why those who do not fit the norm attempt to adjust to it. Due to a cultural discourse, people who do not fit the norm, but attempt to become like it, are ironically active participants in reaffirming the system that harms them. In their attempt to become the norm, the "abnormal" cement the given cultural standards of individual human expressions. I would argue that Dunn and Ozeki both attempt, although in two quite different novels, to provide ironic and satirical outlooks on the stereotypes and norms that prevailed in American in the 1980s and 1990s, and the ways in which many of these structures are both enhanced and revived in today's cultural landscape. Importantly, violence in many forms becomes a source of reaffirming these stereotypes. Two questions that are posed by the authors and which I will discuss in my thesis are: How are stereotypes formed? Who decides what the norm is, and what defines these norms? To use Dunn's expressions, I will examine how some people become "norms" and other "freaks" and how these definitions affect the people that are grouped as one or the other of these concepts. These questions can again shed light on factors like what defines a human

being within a given culture. In other words, what are the prerequisites to be defined as an individual human being within a culture? How people conform (or not) to stereotypes will prove central to these discussions.

I have argued that the novels in question present the reader with characters that face problems because they in general lack the control to define how their bodies are used and for what purpose. Injuries applied to human bodies are caused by a system of stereotypes and violence. A person who lacks body control can be harmed by others. At the same time, injuries also lead to the loss of body control, I propose. Voice becomes an important factor to redefine the controlled body as individual. Moreover, the (violated) body is vital for the development of voice. Because of the centrality of voice I propose that rhetorical tools are also necessary for a reconceptualisation of identity through body control; for female bodies, disabled bodies and other oppressed groups, rhetorics are vital for an individual restructuring of identity. Rhetorical tools can provide for a more ethical way of viewing human beings, possibly opening up some of the questions I posed above, concerning how people are defined as part of a group or as individual human beings in general. Many critics read the novels in question as strictly feminist, focusing amongst other issues on a global feminism and the female grotesque. I will propose in this thesis that both authors look beyond the strictly feminist perspective. In a global setting, by focusing on what happens locally, both authors will point to larger structures that can both limit and redefine not only female bodies but also “othered” bodies in general. As bodies are central to a discussion concerning voice, both authors look to how the body of oppressed people(s) on a global scale, are affected by capitalist power structures and stereotypes. Although indirectly, the authors both investigate, I argue, not only local forms of expressions that apply solely to the female characters in the novels. In addition, they look to global discussion that includes more than the fictional characters. In this way, both novels partake in a larger discussion concerning general human rights, for instance the right of an individual form of expression. Within contemporary, American, feminist literature, both authors therefore have an important place.

Both authors use female and disabled bodies to present their view on how oppressed groups can take part in a larger discussion by reconceptualising their bodies to include a voice that is heard by the majority population. As a result, their novels are forces for a redefinition of male power over cultural norms and media images, I argue. Being part of a creative culture within the American, feminist discourse, both authors use their writing to question how cultural establishments form women's bodies into becoming disordered bodies. The novels themselves become arguments that call for a cultural milieu where voice and expressions are

important, to redefine the impact of disorders. In this thesis, I will question how the authors present their female characters and how they allow or do not allow these characters to take part in such a rhetorical culture of redefinitions and individual forms of expression. By using their own voices for a discussion concerning rhetorical tools, and presenting their characters as doing the same, both authors place themselves within this culture of rhetorical tools and question both the power of voice, rhetorical tools and individual expressions. In the novels, these abstract issues are grounded in a physical reality concerning bodies, sexuality and reproduction, violence and power structures. The feminist projects that the authors take part in are therefore, I propose, a larger project of finding voice and developing it to challenge the given established power structures that are present.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background for this thesis is quite wide and is not only confined to literary theory. I have found it interesting and important to use feminist theory, disability theory, rhetorical theory and theories on stigma and the disgusting to discuss the novels according to the problems stated above. In the following I will briefly describe the theories that are founding for the arguments I will present in this thesis. As this is to a great extent a feminist project, I will first explain the use of the feminist scholars that have been most important to the arguments of my thesis.

Susan Bordo presents and discusses some facts concerning women and their bodily integrity in her book *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. She presents an argument that is based on the images that the body is the home of the individual; therefore the body becomes important for both individual expression and integrity. Faced with pregnancies, motherhood and reproduction in general, Bordo argues that women are, especially in legal matters, not seen as individuals living in a body. Instead they are regarded as mere bodies, facing a possible fate as living incubators (72). Based on this, I argue in this thesis that reproduction is at the core of a feminist liberationist project. Motherhood will therefore be central to my discussion concerning body control and the themes of the two novels. For the female characters in both novels, motherhood is central to their definition of self. In the two texts I discuss, reproduction and (reproductive) sexuality is both limiting and positive for women. Reproduction and sexuality can both lead to diminished body control, or these factors can prove to be empowering. In the two novels, feminine identity is in many ways based on concepts related to reproduction; the female characters are named according to whether they are mothers or not, and according to their cultural status. I will pose the

question: is motherhood and reproduction only limiting as some have argued, and which it can appear to be in the two narratives, or can there be found a unifying and empowering force in the face of motherhood?

Traditionally, within feminist theories, scholars have argued that the family, where women have a defined place as mothers and caretakers, was the main core of control that had to be changed and altered for women to be liberated and seen as individuals, not only perceived according to set standards and norms. Baber and Allen argue that by looking at “the ways that women have been dominated and oppressed in families, and, by portraying them as active agents of change, we stress the power and empowerment of women” (3). Baber and Allen's theories are therefore the basis for where the two novels stand in relation to traditional feminism. I would argue that the two authors both point to aspects concerning this “traditional oppression” within families in their discussion of their female protagonists. Dunn especially, I propose, provides a satirical view on the women within families and how they are used as a means to an end, as producers of children and money for the family patriarch. At the same time, both Dunn and Ozeki deploy a language of empowerment for their female characters, a language they attempt to use to become what Baber and Allen call “active agents of change” (3). A question in this thesis will be whether or not the female characters are actually active agents of change, or if they fail in their projects to become acting individuals because they use a language and expressions related to the traditional family structures. I propose that in the two novels, the authors find ways in which the female characters do not remove themselves from the traditional family structures; instead they attempt to find ways of redefining “family” and “motherhood” to concepts that women can gain power from, both within family structures and outside of them.

Shameem Black's article “Fertile Cosmofeminism. Ruth L. Ozeki and Transnational Reproduction” in *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* (5:1) is important in this context. Black discusses how fertility and violence stand together and provide a common outlook on oppression for women world-wide, not just in Western cultures. What is more important is that she focuses on a common feminism that crosses borders between cultures and nations: a transnational feminism. Black's concept of cosmofeminism is interesting when looking at Dunn's novel, as well as Ozeki's. In both novels, the female characters are able to form relationships with other women, relationship that are, I propose, more functional and based on egalitarian structures than the relationships between women and men. These relationships are formed across both national borders and cultural borders. The two novels therefore present societies of women who attempt to function within the male cultures. These

female societies are formed across borders and cultures.

Black further proposes in her article that capitalism is a massive force that affects the outcome of the combination of women, fertility and violence. This links up with the next bulk of theories that I have used in my thesis; disability theories. Riddell and Watson argue that “disabled people have recently come to see cultural revaluation as central to their political struggle” (2). The game of revaluation and reconceptualisation of identities is therefore a common factor between disability theories and feminist theories, I argue, as both groups attempt to re-envision themselves as individuals and independent actors in their own lives. Disability is, when seen from a cultural and sociological standpoint “culturally produced through the relationship between the mode of production and the central values of society” (Riddell and Watson 6). Disability, capitalist production and patriarchal family structures combined shed light on one of the main reasons for the subjugation of women, I argue. Within the traditional family structure, women are rendered as unable to partake in capitalist production. They were therefore to some extent defined as disabled, because they could not produce. A contrast to this argument is the fact that women have been the target of marketing processes, and have therefore participated in the capitalist system of production as consumers. In my thesis I will pose the question as to whether or not consumerism, combined with an image of women as “disabled” can be seen as a major source of the subjugation of women, and, importantly, whether or not consumerism actually can be a source of control. The woman as both consumed object and consuming subject is an issue that is central in the themes of the two novels, I argue, especially when they are seen together. The female characters struggle with both being consumed and being urged to consume in both novels, albeit in slightly different ways. A discussion concerning these issues will be central to my argument concerning consumerism, disability and body control. The structures that rule both novels are based on capitalist measures, where earning money and marketing either products or people is central. In this system, I propose that the female characters struggle with disordered bodies caused by impossible stereotypes and the urge to make money “just by being themselves” (Dunn 7). Jane states in the beginning of *My Year of Meat* that “I made documentaries about and exotic and vanishing America for consumption on the flip side of the planet” (15), underlining both the impossibility of stereotypes, since her image of America is “exotic and vanishing,” and the ways in which consumption is central for the images she presents. In this culture of marketing and money-making I will propose that the female body becomes disordered and somewhat disabled in the impossible game of trying to reach the given “perfect standard.” Similarly, Dunn's fictional world reveals structures where bodies are

central to a definition of disability and gender oppression, forces controlled by capitalist measures and consumerism.

Within the realm of feminist theory, disability theories can therefore provide a view on the groups that are formed by those who are defined as disabled, and add to the concept of a common feminist ideology. In facing difference and disorders, the characters in the two novels all struggle with being defined as something that differ from the way they view themselves. I propose that the difference of disorders can become a way in which people can redefine their individual reality and identity. I will question whether or not disordered bodies and otherness can be a source for an individual reconceptualisation, and whether group affiliation can be seen as a positive or negative concept in this discussion. In “forging new identities which challenged outworn stereotypes” (Riddell and Watson 3), those who are defined as disabled and oppressed can look to a new source for re-evaluating the standards that provide the starting point for both their self-definitions, and for how others define them.

In their discussion on women and families, Baber and Allen present women as “active constructors of their own reality rather than merely as passive respondents to sociohistorical events and family socialisation” (5), an argument which is clearly linked up with rhetorical theory and the way I will use this in my thesis. David Palumbo-Liu proposes that minority groups must attempt to represent themselves through “rhetorics, discursive formulations, poetics” to motivate people to act “sanely and humanely” (43). In this, I propose, Palumbo-Liu presents a world where voice and rhetorical expressions are important, if not vital, both for a group identity and for individual identities. At the same time, his argument pinpoints that stories have created the worlds in the novels. Rhetorical theories become important in my thesis because by gaining power over individual bodies, women and other oppressed groups will be able to express their individuality through using their voice. Moreover, these groups will be able, as Riddell and Watson argued above, to take actively part in a cultural revaluation and a forging of new identities. By questioning what is being posed as normal and natural, minority groups can, through voice, change the standing dichotomies between good and bad and right and wrong as defined by cultures. Through rhetorical tools and a distinct voice, the female authors actively take part in a written discussion concerning issues ranging from motherhood to disability and identity. Moreover, the female characters in both novels are constantly seen as renegotiating the use of their voices, underlining the importance of textual participation. As a result, I propose that the novels become meta-texts, providing commentary on the actual rhetorical tools that are present in contemporary America. In addition, they also point to, through their female protagonists, that these rhetorical tools have effects beyond

America itself, affecting a world-wide culture of words, media and imagery.

Martha Nussbaum's theories on the disgusting and the stigmatised subject are also interesting in the context of the novels' themes. Nussbaum's theories shed light on ways in which disgust functions as both mental and juridical stigmatisation and oppression of those who are perceived as different in one way or the other. I will use Nussbaum's theories to highlight how difference, motherhood and disgust function in terms of rendering women somewhat disordered. Disgust will prove to be, I argue, one of the founding factors for deciding what is marketable and culturally positive, and is closely linked to aspects concerning bodily functions. People who are seen as disabled are therefore to great extent linked with the disgusting, as they are more easily seen as mortal and mere body. Riddell and Watson quote Tom Shakespeare (1994): "People project their fear of death, their unease at their physicality and mortality, onto disabled people, who represent all these different aspects of human existence" (8). Nussbaum, using a similar argument, argues that disgust "embodies a shrinking from contamination that is associated with the human desire to be nonanimal" (74). People who are disabled in different ways are therefore seen as contaminants. As a result, they are unable to take actively part in capitalist production. And because capitalist production is vital for both cultures in the two novels, disgust becomes a force which is present throughout the presentation and creation of stereotypes. In addition, disgust is closely linked to the female reproductive body. In both *My Year of Meats* and *Geek Love*, the reproductive body is presented as a locus of power, at the same time as the two novels portray different ways of attempting to come to terms with the labels "disabled" and "disgusting" that are applied to the body. The reproductive body is crucial in this, and is the factor that will link disability, capitalism and voice in the themes in the two novels, I propose. Since those who are viewed as disgusting are unable to participate in marketing, disgust is central for being defined as disabled. Because disgust is a stigmatising factor, it is also the factor that urges people to want to change into the stereotype. The stereotypes become a way of escaping being marked as "freakish," at the same time as becoming the stereotypes reaffirms the prevailing power structures, underlining the presence of disgust.

Structure

I have chosen to divide this thesis into three main chapters. The first chapter is concerned with issues that touch upon cultural stereotypes and the normativity of the cultures that the two authors portray. Central to my discussion will be the focus on the bodies in the two texts, bodies that are ruled by stereotypes that are created for the means of capital gain. Olympia

states that her parents were disappointed when she “emerged with such commonplace deformities” (8), still she was kept because a “bald albino hunchback seemed the right enticement toward the esoteric talents of the rest of the family” (8). In the Binewski culture, children are kept only if they can produce money for the show. *My American Wife!* portrays images of women that are only meant to sell meat to Japanese customers: “Meat is the Message. Each weekly half-hour episode of *My American Wife!* must culminate in the celebration of the featured meat, climaxing in its glorious consumption” (8). The title of the show becomes ironic, when the wives are not the main focus of the show: instead marketing meat is. Those who cannot market the meat are incomplete and deviant.

These aspects of capitalism and disability are combined with feminist theories that regard the female body as disabled and disordered. I will describe how disabled and disordered bodies are created by cultures and how they function within these cultures. My main argument and question will be how women are seen as disordered and in some ways defined as disabled in the prevailing cultures. In the novels, many of the women suffer from disorders: problems caused by drug intake, reproductive disorders due to oestrogen exposure and bulimia. I propose that the cultural stereotypes in the novels cause these disorders on the female body. The cultural basis in the two novels will be investigated, where stereotypes and normative images are decisive for human value and individual expressions, and based on financial incentives. I will define the difference between disabled and disordered and describe how I will use these definitions in the introduction to chapter one, where I discuss how the female characters' bodies are linked with this concept of production and central, cultural values, by being marked as somewhat disordered and different.

In chapter two I focus on the feminine reproductive body, and how it becomes the core of the issues that concern both power over one's own personal and individual body, and the general body of oppressed groups in American culture. Reproduction becomes an image of general body control, as reproduction has the power of changing both women's physical bodies and their lives. Dunn presents female reproduction as vital for the survival of the show, because Lily gives birth to the children who earn money for the carnival. Sexuality and reproduction is also seen by the girls in the family as a way of liberation or climbing in the hierarchy, underlining the importance of reproduction for the female individual. Reproduction is crucial for the Binewski economy and culture, and also for individual development. Ozeki presents women who are mothers, who struggle with mothering and reproduction, and who attempt to find different ways of being mothers. Jane believes that she is barren due to foetal oestrogen exposure, and struggles with accepting this. Being able to control reproductive

abilities becomes, therefore, a key issue to how people in general can envision and execute body control. In the two novels, reproduction is seen as difficult to control for the female characters, underlining this importance, in addition to pointing to how being in control over one's body is central to individuality. Is it possible to see motherhood as such a powerful force that it can open up for more general discussion concerning individuality and personal expressions?

In chapter three, my main focus will be on the rhetorics of oppressed groups, and how motherhood is linked with the power of being in control over language and voice, as reproduction forms the core of power over bodies in general. Rhetorical tools and bodies become linked in the face of oppression, as the stereotypes in the two novels are created and reaffirmed by stories, rhetorical tools and mediated images. When bodies and individuals are oppressed there is no room for voicing needs and concerns, and I will point to different ways in which the female characters in the two novels attempt to create and redefine their voice and ways of expression. Two contrastive rhetorics appear as a result, the masculine and the feminine. These two rhetorics have distinct traits, and in the two novels a struggle between them is present. I will discuss how Dunn and Ozeki present their place in the discussion concerning feminist issues in America, and how their books are part of a rhetorical discussion concerning how women and other oppressed groups are to voice their needs and concerns when it comes to how their daily lives function. Further, the novels both portray female characters who want to perceive of themselves as active agents in their own lives, and try to reach this individuality. As the novels in questions are two quite different books, they point to different aspects of feminist literature. Still, both novels, I argue, find their place in the general discussion of, and as, rhetorical expressions that make up a feminist literature and a struggle to find a separate and distinct voice. My most important focus in this chapter will be how Dunn and Ozeki present their novels as part of this rhetorical development, and how they bring together concepts of power, motherhood, the rhetorical tools of oppressed groups and the general stereotypes in American culture. My main question in this chapter will be: How do the two novels actively take part in and comment on the power structures and use of rhetorical tools in the prevailing power systems?

Chapter 1

Cultural Stereotypes, Disability and Body Control

That had been Cathy's dream, to have an American son, and Bert had paid for her dream with his hand (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 58).

You aren't ever going to look like a fashion queen! Does that mean you have to be miserable all your life? Does it? Can you be happy with the movies and the ads and the clothes in the stores and the doctors and the eyes as you walk down the street all telling you there is something *wrong* with you? No. You can't. You cannot be happy. Because, you poor darling baby, you *believe* them... (Dunn, *Geek Love* 178).

Introductory Remarks

In this chapter I will discuss how the cultures that are described in *Geek Love* and *My Year of Meats* define and set standards for human expressions in connection with notions of disability, capitalist structures and body control. In the combination of capitalism and disability, norms are set in societies that define those who are unable to produce as disabled, making a “hegemony of disability” (Oliver in Riddell and Watson 6). Further, E. Kay M. Tisdall argues that disability is a “creation of the capitalist mode of production, with disabled people defined as non-productive in the work force and dominant ideologies” (Tisdall in Riddell and Watson 25). Tisdall goes on to explain how this concept of the disabled as non-productive leaves them outside of a full citizenship (25). Based on this, I propose that disabled people are not seen as full individuals in power of themselves, because their bodies are not worthy of such a definition in the prevailing cultures in the two novels. In my discussion of *Geek Love* and *My Year of Meats*, I will use a quite inclusive version of the expression “disability,” sometimes, perhaps, crossing the borders of what is seen as the comfortable zone of naming a person disabled. By doing so, I will amongst other issues, discuss how and why some people are called disabled, and what this entails for the person in question, both in the two novels, and in society in general. In connection with the disabled body and the characters in the novels, I will draw on discussions concerning stereotypes and disorder, where disorders are arguably results of bodies and individuals being limited by stereotypes. Disorders and disordered bodies are therefore part of the disabled-enabled dichotomy that I argue is present in the two novels in question.

The two quotes from the novels above both point to aspects linked with stereotypes, disability and capitalism. Bert paid for his wife's dream with his hand in a farming accident,

wanting to make money to build them a life together. He becomes disabled in the search for his wife's version of the American Dream. In the quote from Dunn's novel, Arturo speaks to a member of his audience, accenting the reasons why she is miserable with herself. She does not look like the stereotype would want her to, and in her despair, she underlines that normative images are in many ways impossible to achieve. Although Arturo's comment may seem positive when it is read out of context, his meaning in the novel is to take the audience under his wings, to use them for financial gain. His goal is selfish and capitalist.

Consumerism and capitalism are vital forces in the construction of disability. Both texts discuss these issues, in their presentation of cultures that are based on economic structures. Disability studies have been particularly critical of the dichotomy between dependence and independence, based on the presumption of “productive” waged employment (Tisdall 26). I will discuss this in light of how individuals are dependent on productive employment to be defined as able-bodied, and also how those who define the stereotypes and standards for disability are dependent on these structures of disability to reaffirm them. Martha Nussbaum's concept of disgust will be important in how I define stereotypes and capitalism as linked closely together. Nussbaum argues that disgust is culturally defined, at the same time as it is in general based on the fear of the animal and the human body, due to an inherent knowledge of death in human beings. I will discuss how disgust is central to a definition of bodies that meet, or do not meet, marketing standards.

As the quote from Dunn's novel above underlines, fictions and stories are central in *Geek Love* in terms of both establishing and reaffirming the cultures, stereotypes and constructs of disability: Arturo questions how the and why the woman believes the people who set the standards, underlining that standards are fictional, and importantly that they must be believed to function. Likewise, in Ozeki's novel, stories form a great deal of the narrative, because Jane's project is to make televised images for the company Beef-Ex. Fictions are also part of defining the disability-capitalism structure. Presenting stories to other people is therefore a concept which is present in both novels, and these fictions reaffirm and establish given stereotypes and truths. My aim in this chapter is to describe how these stories function in the context of establishing stereotypes based on concepts of capital value and marketing abilities.

In both *Geek Love* and *My Year of Meats*, women remain oppressed when faced with capitalist forces and notions of disability. Sheila Riddell and Nick Watson argue that a remedy for oppression was “forging new identities which challenged outworn stereotypes” (3). In light of this, I will, towards the end of this chapter, discuss how the two authors present

disordered and disabled bodies as somewhat enabled to form structures of power within the prevailing cultural systems which oppress them. I argue that the authors, through describing the female characters' struggles, attempt to question how women are defined in the given cultures and why. Further, the authors question in what ways the structures of stereotypes and definitions function in the cultures that are described in the novels.

In the introduction to this thesis I argued that both Dunn and Ozeki have created worlds where women make up the basis for the cultures, but where men remain in control over the definitions of the human beings within them. Embedded in these worlds are stereotypes and normative images that define and control individual human expressions. Important in both *Geek Love* and *My Year of Meats* are the ways in which normative standards and stereotypes are formed and develop, in cultures where stereotypes are important, if not vital, for the social structures and value hierarchies to function.

Stereotypes, Capitalism and Disability

Al Binewski bases his income on his children, whom he has created to be specifically as they are, “freaks” if defined by “standard” terms. He once looked at a garden with genetically manipulated flowers, which got him “thinking, how the oddity of them was beautiful, and how that oddity was contrived to give them value” (Dunn 9). Dunn paints a picture of the Binewski culture as a system where difference becomes all-important, and defining for human value. Using drugs and manipulation to create his children, Al's major goal is that they will be different. If the children are different, they can serve in the show as attractions for an audience from the outside world. The given situation in the Binewski carnival is underlined in the character Olympia's view on herself. Being “only” hunchbacked and albino, she states that “my situation was far too humdrum to be marketable on the same scale as my brother's and sisters' [...] The dwarfism [...] increased my value” (8). The actors in the system are aware of how their value is defined, and they act accordingly, hoping to become more different to enhance their general value. What is interesting in Dunn's fiction is that the defining factor for value in *Geek Love* is freakishness when defined by standard terms. The audience from the outside world are fascinated by the children's otherness, at the same time as this otherness defines the children's value. As a result, Dunn's novel opens up for a satirical outlook on stereotypes in society in general. In her presentation of the perfect Binewski, Dunn sheds lights on the stereotypes that rule the normal, American society. In addition, the curiosity of the audience underlines that they too are preoccupied with aspects of human physicality and “freakishness.”

Along the same lines, Ozeki presents a world where stereotypes define the basis for both human value and interest. According to Shameem Black, *My American Wife!*, the show Jane creates in Ozeki's novel, portrays "visions of sanitized, conservative femininity to its Japanese audience" (231). The women presented on the show are not obese, not squalid, and are not "second class peoples" (Ozeki 12). Jane describes the perfect American wife: Bunny Dunn "is balanced on the split-rail fence that surrounded her ranch house [...] as amplitude personified, replete with meat, our ideal American wife" (252). Bunny Dunn has large breasts, is a blond, former stripper, married to a considerably older man who owns a cattle farm. She is stay-at-home mum with her daughter Rose, defining the stereotype that American women are supposed to meet according to the TV-show. Ozeki's description of Akiko's journey from single to married asserts this stereotype: "When [Akiko] got married, she gave up her job in order to learn to cook and otherwise prepare for motherhood" (Ozeki 37). Both on television and in real life, women are supposed to be pretty housewives with children, who spend their time preparing food to feed their families.

Kristine M. Baber and Katherine R. Allen argue that "feminists have exploded the myth of the family as a safe and stable haven and pointed to ways in which women's lives are constrained by even their most intimate and caring relationships" (1). Families and family structures are crucial for both the development of the stereotypes and the ways in which these function to define women in the two novels. Consequently, Baber and Allen's argument becomes central to the discussion of stereotypes within the cultural systems that are described in the two novels, as both narratives focus on the family as the unit where stereotypes are most easily inscribed on women and their bodies. As a result, the novels underline Baber and Allen's argument that the family is not a safe haven; the family and familial structures that are described in the novels are rather the opposite of safe. Hence, a critique of the traditional family structures is present in both texts. Further, within traditional family structures, women's bodies become a site for control, a notion that is central to the authors' critique, I argue.

Although both novels focus on the family as a structure which causes and creates stereotypes, I propose that Ozeki's description of stereotypes is more clearly linked to a culture which is based on traditional, patriarchal structures than Dunn's description. This is caused by the insistence on the phenomenon "housewife" in *My Year of Meats*. Nirmala Erevelles states that "with industrialization, an idealized division of labor arose in which men's work was to follow production outside the home, while women's work was to remain centered in the household," a division of labour which, through its "housewifization" affirmed

women as economically dependent on men, and therefore inferior (Erevelles 101-2). In the constant depiction of women as housewives and mothers in *My American Wife!*, the message that is marketed to the Japanese audience is the stereotype of woman as housewife, a woman who is, and should be, financially dependent on her husband. Erevelles' argument also links the concept of capitalism and stereotypes even more closely together. She pinpoints the traditional family structures as the basis for a development of both financial gain for men and limiting stereotypes for women in the contrast between waged employment and the unpaid work as housewife.

In *My Year of Meats*, the effects of this old-fashioned stereotype as it is presented to the Japanese audience are negative and bleak. Ozeki writes:

The modern Japanese housewife, living in a hermetic existence, increasingly cut off from contact with the world, is literally losing her voice. Dr. Horii studies eating disorders, depression, substance abuse, and other dysfunctional behaviours among Japanese housewives (87).

I would like to stress two words in this quote: “modern” and “dysfunctional.” Both are words that are relative when it comes to value and content, and I would argue that Ozeki presents Dr. Horii with adding subjective value to these words. He defines “housewife” as a modern concept, when I would argue that this role is rather old-fashioned. Further, I propose that the use of the concept “dysfunctional behaviour” marks behaviour that does not fit with the given stereotype, it is therefore relative according to the culture in which the behaviour takes place. The standard “housewife” becomes the starting point for defining some types of behaviour as “dysfunctional,” a questionable process, I argue.

Both Dunn's and Ozeki's description of stereotypes are grounded on the body and in what ways the body can be presented and formed. The physical body is decisive for whether a person is defined inside or outside of a given stereotype or a given group. The body is crucial for an individual, in that it becomes the face of her social position. Both authors are critical towards the fact that in milieus that create strict stereotypes, the body becomes the face of the individual. The body is not an individual expression, but rather a tool that others can use to decide where the person in question stands within a society. Dunn presents an example of this in her description of the women who work on the Binewski show: “ALL female performers [...] are required to have red hair of a particular bright [...] shade” (222). The Binewski family uses the red hair as an easy way of marking what status the girls have within the show. The hair becomes a uniform that describes the redheads' position within the Binewski culture. I argue that the red hair becomes symbolic of how bodies become uniforms that place

individuals in their “right” place within a social system. Similarly, Bunny Dunn's body becomes her uniform; it places her in the specific position of sexual housewife. Dunn stresses the concept of bodies as uniforms in Olympia's comment about her daughter: “I had figured her for silly, for toad-brained, because she is so near normal” (25). Olympia considers Miranda's physique alone when she tries to define what she is like. Appearance is therefore crucial for how people define others as parts of specific groups. In the following I will, based on this, discuss one of Bordo's arguments concerning disorders and female bodies. This discussion is also related to the concept of “dysfunctional behaviours” in the quote from *My Year of Meats* above.

Susan Bordo argues that stereotypical and normative images of women are inscribed on female bodies in the appearance of disorders (168-9). In *My Year of Meats*, Rose, the daughter of the “perfect American wife” Bunny Dunn, is an example of this. Rose suffers from premature thelarche due to oestrogen poisoning. She has been exposed to oestrogen at the farm; her uncle gives the cattle hormones as a part of the meat production process. At the age of five, Rose has breasts and her menstrual cycle has begun (276). I would argue that Rose's illness becomes a symbol of stereotype come disorder as Bordo describes, or rather, the other way around: disorder come stereotype. Rose is presented in *My Year of Meats* as being lucky. Her father says to Bunny that she should be proud of Rose's breasts and that she will grow up to be a “regular little heartbreaker” (272) because of her physical appearance. To him, Rose's disorder makes her sexual. Furthermore, her sexual appearance is positive to him because women are, according to the stereotype, supposed to be sexual as housewives and mothers. Bunny, on the other hand, sees the negative side of her daughter's early development. Just like her mother, Rose will be bound by her physique and can be nothing but an object because “with a body like that, who's gonna look at her face, right?” (276). This comment suggests the limiting borders that surround the stereotype, limits that are closely linked to the physical body. If the body is the decisive factor for what a person is defined as, like in the example with Rose, an individual cannot really be anything else than her body. As a result, the body is impossible to escape from. The body is the uniform a person must inevitably wear. Although Bordo is mainly concerned with psychological disorders, I propose that Ozeki's description of the girl's physical disorder becomes the literal objectifying inscription on the sexualised girl/woman. Rose's father's positive reaction to her potentially dangerous disorder accents the normative images of women as extreme females, ironically celebrating a possible fatal condition because it makes the little girl fit perfectly into the established norm of sexualised mother-and-wife. The “modern” status of housewife is revealed as old-fashioned

and harmful, and the “dysfunctional behaviours” are created by the harmful impact of these stereotypes, marking the women that do not fit the stereotype as abnormal, deviant and different, not completely woman.

Ozeki's female character Akiko, wife of Joichi Ueno, also has a serious disorder. She suffers from bulimia, and I propose that this is a vivid example of stereotype come disorder. Akiko's disorder is a result of her position as a housewife in Japan, her bulimia started almost in the instant she married Joichi. A patient's account of her anorexia is this: “Energy, discipline, my own power will keep me going ... I will be master of my own body, if nothing else” (Bordo 172). I propose that the bulimia is a result of the stereotypes in two ways. Firstly, since Akiko's life is far from perfect, and she does not conform to stereotypes, she reacts by taking control over her eating habits in a search to empower herself and in some ways claim perfection, through developing a thin, female body. Ironically, this strive for control hinders her in realising the “perfect” according to the norm: Akiko cannot make a family with Joichi, because her bulimia has stopped her menstrual cycle. Therefore, Akiko is left in a catch-22 situation where she never can become the perfect stereotype. On the other hand, I propose that Akiko's disorder is an unconscious attempt to escape the stereotype. In some ways, Dr. Horii comment concerning “dysfunctional behaviour” becomes true, because Akiko does not function as she should according to the given standard. The “dysfunctional behaviour” is an escape route, where Akiko's body attempts, but does not manage, to become the opposite of the stereotype. Akiko's situation underlines my argument from the introduction: The body is twofold, it can either be affected by outside forces, or gain power in itself, a concept I will discuss further at a later point in this chapter.

In other words, Bordo presents disorders caused by stereotypes as a way of trying to gain power over the stereotyped body, as described in the quote above from the patient with an eating disorder. However, trying to become and at the same time escape stereotypes becomes a rather desperate and impossible game, symbolised by Ozeki's description of Akiko's futile eating disorder. This struggle placed in the gap between becoming and rejecting stereotypes, enhances the body's position within the realm of normative concepts. The body is vital for control over an individual's position in society, in addition to providing for a specific social interpretation of the person in question by considering the body and its physical appearance. Disciplining and normalising the female body is a durable and flexible form of social control (Bordo 166). This lack of control becomes physical and visible in the meeting between disorder and stereotype, and Akiko and Bunny provide two opposite symbols of this. The contrast between the abundant Bunny and the skinny Akiko marks how disorders affect

the physical body in the face of stereotypes. Controlling bodies is vital both for those who attempt to become the stereotype, and for those who try to escape it. As a result, both the bodies that are “deviant” and the bodies that adhere to the stereotype are marked. In the two novels, the female characters' bodies are the units where stereotypes are inscribed. I propose that the female characters in the novels have no say in changing or altering the definitions of stereotypes, as the locus of control lies in the hands of the male characters. Their physical bodies are shaped by male forces, either directly or symbolically. As a result, this physical impact of stereotypes is extremely visible on the bodies of the female characters.

Earlier, I proposed that the stereotypes in Ozeki's novel are more clearly based on patriarchal power structures, than those in *Geek Love*. However, by examining one of Dunn's female characters, the ways in which the Binewski culture is based on patriarchal structures are revealed. Another literal inscription of disorders onto female bodies is presented in Lily:

Mama was slipping away from us. Her pill intake was up and her body was changing. Large bones came close to the surface as her woman-softness withered. Her eyes were giving her trouble, the focus softening and shortening (187-8).

Towards the end of her life, Lily is rendered as incomplete and physically destroyed. I propose that Lily's process of disintegration is caused by her position within the carnival structure: wife to Al Binewski and mother to his children. To produce the children, Lily has been given enormous amounts of drugs. As a result, her status as housewife and mother has literally caused her disintegration because the pill-intake was an integrated part of her social position. In addition, Dunn's presentation of Lily links capitalist structures closely to the development of stereotypes and disorders, as the children Lily produces are viewed as products, and exploited for economical gain. Lily's disintegration is therefore symbolic of the literal and physical process of stereotype come disorder, caused by the stereotypes that are defined on the basis of capitalist structures. Lily is nearly blind, she has developed a disability, and her body is more or less destroyed towards the end of the novel due to the impact of these cultural, patriarchal norms. The patriarchal system is underlined when considering the fact that Lily has been a vital part of creating the carnival which Al controls, without her, the children would never have been born. However, she is not celebrated as an active participant in the economic structure to which she has contributed. Rather, her body is sacrificed on the altar of the Binewski carnival's finances, her body counts less than the process of making children for the show. In other words, Lily is not regarded as an acting individual in the Binewski culture, but rather a means to an end, a bodily utensil. The

inscription of disorders, through the use of drugs, is therefore administered actively as a tool in the Binewski world, where disorders in some enhance both economic and social control for others. Consequently, Dunn presents Lily's body as the extreme version of how women are inscribed with disorders due to male control and stereotypes.

Michael Hardin proposes that in *Geek Love* the “mutated body is desired and empowered” (338). At first sight it could appear that Lily has a powerful position within the Binewski culture: She fulfils the norm of wife and mother, is perceived as pretty, and gives birth to the children that power the Binewski show. The carnival crew listen to her, and see her as an authority despite her disintegration and pill-intake. By contrast, I argue that Lily's disintegration points to a different reality, namely that within the prevailing cultural structures, neither the mutated and disordered body, nor the perfect body is empowered. Based on this, I propose that both Dunn and Ozeki present worlds where total empowerment of bodies becomes somewhat impossible. Being woman, healthy and empowered at the same time becomes the seemingly impossible goal that the characters attempt to achieve in different ways. In the following, I will discuss this in a combination of marketing techniques and the image of the people who are marked as “able to sell.”

As I have argued, the cause of Lily's disintegration and disorders is largely that her body has been used as a means to an end, as a tool to earn money; a piece in the puzzle of capitalist production. Her pill-intake is then not only the literal image of stereotypes come disorder, but the literal image of how bodies are used as a part of structures that enhance capitalist earnings. The body becomes a unit for the economic empowerment of those who control the stereotypes. Both authors have therefore envisioned and critiqued cultures where bodies are subjugated when they are valued based on their ability to make money in a world defined by set stereotypes and norms for human expressions.

UNDESIRABLE THINGS:

1. Physical imperfections
2. Obesity
3. Squalor
4. Second class peoples (Ozeki 12).

The main goal that the show *My American Wife!* must achieve, is to raise the sales numbers of American beef in Japan. Ozeki underlines in this that beneath the stereotypes is a crucial capitalist argument, marked by marketing possibilities. As I stated earlier, the stereotyped image of American women that is conveyed through the TV-show is a sanitised version,

women untouched by the quoted “undesirable things” above. The show is meant to inspire young Japanese women in becoming the stereotype; the woman who stays at home and cooks meat for her family. “[M]arket studies do show that the average Japanese wife finds a middle-to-upper-middle-class white American woman with two to three children to be both sufficiently exotic and yet reassuringly familiar” (Ozeki 13). Consequently, the market research decides the stereotypical standard. What is most important to the show are “values which must be all-American” (12), and Beef-Ex therefore takes it on them to define what these values include, in addition to declaring these as the American stereotype. According to Beef-Ex these “contemporary wholesome values [are] represented [...] by good, nourishing food for her entire family. And that means meat” (13). The short message from Beef-Ex, critically scrutinised by Ruth Ozeki is that people with any form of “physical imperfection” which spans from actual physical impairments to not meeting the standards of beauty, are unable to sell a product. Consequently, they are not to be part of a conveyed stereotype of American women, and cannot be portrayed in any form to the Japanese audience. In other words, only the women who are more or less perfect according to certain standards are able and allowed to sell an image, strongly linking capitalist incentives to notions of physical beauty. Similarly, the Binewskis set strict standards for those who are able to make money, and Olympia, who is too normal according to the given norm, is critiqued:

'Nobody expects you to bring in the kind of money that I do.' [Arturo said] I shook my head. That would be absurd. 'Or even,' he pursed his mouth, 'what the twins manage.' I put my eyes down onto my knees and sighed, my whole worthless body quivering. 'It isn't your fault that you're so ordinary' (Dunn 75).

The stereotypes in both novels are therefore thoroughly based on economical strategies and marketing abilities.

Martha Nussbaum describes the phenomenon “disgust” as a powerful emotion, often linked to the avoidance of certain groups of people, as these are seen as contaminants that can infect those parts of society which are normally perceived as being pure. “Disgust embodies a shrinking from contamination that is associated with the human desire to be nonanimal” (Nussbaum 74). Disgust leads to the avoidance of certain groups and is often seen as a decisive factor for what people perceive as moral behaviour (76-77). Based on this I propose that disgust in many ways is the platform on which the capitalist systems and the factors for human value are based.

As Joichi's strategy for *My American Wife!* is to promote beef to Japanese customers, he must, as earlier described, present a general image of American wives as healthy makers and eaters of beef dinners. The “undesirable things” quoted above are disgusting objects

perceived as contaminants, in general bad for marketing and business development. Beef-Ex does not “want their meat to have a synergistic associations with deformities. Like race. Or poverty. Or clubfeet” (Ozeki 57), Jane states, underlining that behind Joichi's image of the sanitised version of American women lies a powerful fear of contamination. Joichi's reason for presenting women in this specific way is based on the notion that both Beef-Ex's meat and the Japanese women should be kept clean. They must be protected from the contaminants which are defined by Joichi as poverty, disability, or race, all factors that are included under the heading “second class peoples.” As a result of these perceived contaminants, Ozeki presents her character with having a narrow image of human beings, and especially women.

Arturo in *Geek Love* underlines this fear of the different. “These [horror stories] are written by norms to scare norms. And do you know what the monsters and demons and rancid spirits are? Us, that's what. You and me. We are the things that come to the norms in nightmares” (46). Dunn's satire gives her the possibility to make her characters aware of the fact that they are different, and in this point to concepts of disgust and difference both within their own culture in addition to the cultures in the outside world. What is more, Dunn's satire also highlights that disgusting is a somewhat relative concept. The Binewskis have widely different standards from Joichi in deciding what is disgusting or not. In fact, the Binewskis embody what Joichi fears shall contaminate his food. The sanitised versions of women that Joichi seeks are those who are perceived as disgusting by the Binewskis, the two visions of disgust are completely opposite. Chick, the youngest Binewski, was “generally deprecated for his lack of abnormality and has been made to feel dramatically inferior to his 'more gifted' siblings” (Dunn 221). Having no physical differences, Chick looked “normal.” However, although the visions of the disgusting differ, disgust, in both cultures, is vitally linked to the (un)marketability of different human beings, which is defined on the basis of bodies and physical appearance. Consequently, a system where disgust is central to the development of cultural norms and stereotypes appear in the two novels, and I propose that both authors form critical arguments towards cultural standards based on this combined concept of disgust and marketing. Dunn's satire aids in highlighting the capitalist measures that base their standards on relative and subjective judgements of what is disgusting and what is not. Importantly, both the perfect body and the imperfect body are subjugated in this system. The perfect body is used as a tool, where the imperfect body is rejected. As a result, neither the perfect, nor the different body, as Hardin argues, is empowered in this context of marketing and financial incentives.

Furthermore, because disgust is linked to marketing, a perfectly functioning body can be rendered as disgusting, in the same ways as those who do not meet the standards of the sanitised woman are unable to market goods. Disgust is therefore linked to a certain form of disability, I would argue. According to Tom Shakespeare:

People project their fear of death, their unease at their physicality and mortality, onto disabled people, who represent all these different aspects of human existence. Disabled people are scapegoats. It is not just that disabled people are different, expensive, inconvenient or odd; it is that they represent a threat [...] to the self-conception of Western beings – who, since the Enlightenment, have tried to view themselves as perfectible, as all knowing, as God like (quoted in Riddell and Watson 8).

In this quote, Tom Shakespeare links the notion of disgust to the ways in which people look at disabled people. In similar ways as disgust causes a fear of death and contamination, so does looking at a disabled person. According to Tisdall, disability is a “creation of the capitalist mode of production” (25-6). As a result, disgust and disability share two defining factors: marketing and capitalist production, and the fear of the contaminating impact of the different. When investigating the novels in light of this, an interesting concept concerning how disability and disgust are defined appears. I propose that those who are marked with disgust can in some ways be seen as disabled in the two novels, since they cause the same reactions in other people.

The factors that define stereotypes are based on concepts that apply to the body. As a result, I argue that those who simply fail in fulfilling the given stereotypes are rendered as somewhat disabled within a given cultural environment. This is caused by the focus on physically unmarked bodies in marketing; as a result, those who are “other” and “different” are unable to partake in capitalist production to its full extent. I propose therefore that the two novels in question define “disabled” to be an extremely wide and inclusive concept. People who do not fulfil standards, and therefore are regarded with disgust, are left in a limbo between normality and disability, leaning towards being defined as disabled in one way or the other. The main critique, as I see it, is most clearly voiced by Dunn. The relative concept of what kind of bodies are “able” is underlined by the ways in which Olympia's lack of value is not based on the ability to produce *something*, but is rather defined on her body *in itself*. Dunn's novel is a force which, through its satire and portrayal of an extreme capitalisation of people, sheds light on aspects of society and how human beings are valued in power of what their bodies are and how they function, rather than their actual abilities. Stereotypes that rely on the body are therefore further enhanced when they become disorders and disabilities in the

meeting with aspects of capitalist production. Underlined by Ozeki in her description of what is needed for a woman to be marketable, disability becomes more of a general concept which in the utmost effect can apply to all people whose bodies do not completely appear to adhere to the narrow norms and stereotypes in society. In other words, common human flaws and lack of perfection become disabilities in an economic system of power, as the stigma and disgust of those who control the culture in question hinder those who are perceived as flawed in taking active part in the economy. In other words, these people are hindered from becoming valued for their ability to contribute to capital growth and cultural development. And because they can never partake in capitalist production; they become disabled.

However, in *My Year of Meats*, being marked as pretty limits women to the stereotype, as Bunny Dunn's story underlines. In *Geek Love*, Dunn's character Miss Lick provides an interesting theory on the limits of prettiness in *Geek Love*. Miss Lick is a wealthy businesswoman, intent on changing pretty women's lives. Her project is to operate on and change pretty women, so that they no longer are perceived as sexual by men. When they no longer are pretty, Miss Lick believes, they can develop their minds and careers, instead of using their energy on a husband and children. Miss Lick's methods include acid burns and breast removal. "Miss Lick's purpose is to liberate women who are liable to be exploited by male hungers. These exploitable women are, in Miss Lick's view, the pretty ones. She feels great pity for them" (Dunn 162). Dunn allows Miranda to voice her point of view when thinking about one of the women Miss Lick has treated from prettiness: "She looks bad. [...] There are a lot of scars on her face. [...] You wouldn't believe it, but [she] is happy" (32). Dunn's point of view is, I propose, that Miss Lick does make some women more content with their lives after the operation; she does open up the possibility for women to take active part in production. Nevertheless, Dunn's critique lies in that although Miss Lick has presented a way out of the normative beauty image and the ways in which women are taken advantage of and limited when they are pretty, Miss Lick's solution can be seen only as an escape and not a true change in the cultural environment. The women she treats are in some ways freed from the stereotype that make them wives and mothers, but they are rendered culturally ugly, hence they are regarded as disabled due to their inability to market goods. This becomes evident when Ozeki's construct of marketability is applied to Dunn's text. Although many of the women take part in production and have waged employment after their "treatments," they are remade in some ways as not fully female, because they have lost their physical, stereotypical, feminine assets. Combining the two authors' theories on "pretty women" has opened up a situation where both those who are defined as pretty and those who are not, are in some ways

marked as disabled. In Ozeki's world, those who are “ugly” cannot sell goods, and in Dunn's world those who are pretty do not realise that they can partake in production.

Following from the disorders that are caused by the stereotypes that limit women, and the ways in which women that are unable to become the stereotype are marked as somewhat disabled, the female characters in the novels are caught in a catch-22 situation. They are doubly disordered. The image of American women that is presented through *My American Wife!* is extremely narrow, and as a result, millions of women are excluded from this normative image. At the same time, women consume the images and attempt to adopt them as their own reality. The female audience is urged to take on what is presented as the perfect woman, both in terms of physical beauty, and in terms of a certain way of life. Through their role as consumers in capitalist systems, the female characters reaffirm and enhance the stereotypes in their attempts to become the norm by altering and manipulating their bodies to appear “flawless.” In other words, bodies, in their struggle to become a stereotype, reaffirm the stereotype's status, leading to further oppression of those who are unable to become the norm. Because physical beauty and appearance is central to the stereotypes, I propose that both Dunn and Ozeki look to bodies as the force that must be discussed for a cultural liberation to occur. Only in considering physical bodies and how they are affected by stereotypical imagery, can women become active individuals within the social systems that are described in the novels.

The combination of stereotypes, disability and capitalism stands strong in both novels. In *Geek Love*, Lily's disintegration becomes the symbol of this link. Ozeki also provides a similar symbol: Christina Bukowsky, one of the people filmed to be part of *My American Wife!*, was run over by a Wal-Mart truck. She was in a coma for a long time, and is paralysed from the waist down. Bodies and body control are crucial in the struggle to gain power within cultural systems, because bodies are central for the attack of the capitalist, disabling powers, as symbolised by these characters' destinies. In the worlds that Dunn and Ozeki have created, the female characters are in many ways left without individual power, because of the disabling factors caused by disorders, stereotypes and marketing incentives.

Culture and Fiction – the Fluid Nature of Truth

It took a while for Papa to get it all out. He hadn't got it organized as a story yet (Dunn 95).

Monica Chiu argues that America has both been constructed by others and has constructed itself through fictions (101). Both Dunn and Ozeki have envisioned worlds that are created in

this manner. *My American Wife!*, the TV-programme in *My Year of Meats* creates and portrays images of America to Japanese housewives, images that Jane makes following Beef-Ex's rules. The carnival in *Geek Love* has its basis in the "Binewski discourse" (92) established by "the Great Talker" (4), Al Binewski himself. Al tells his children and wife stories of their creation and meaning of life (4-5). Therefore, both worlds present stories and images as important for how people define themselves, as these fictions imagine how human beings shall be like. The TV-programme in Ozeki's novel becomes the culmination of showing how culture and gender stereotypes can be portrayed through fiction defined as documentary, aired in half hour programmes on the other side of the globe. Further, the TV-programme reveals how the cultures and gender expressions in the two novels are based on words, texts and images, the meanings of which are defined by men. The crew in New York where Jane works state that the show was "dumb. Silly" (27). Because they are part of its creation, they realise that the show portrays created fictions. However, those who are defined by the stereotypes and watch the show are meant to adopt these stories as given truths, and use them to define their view on themselves and the surrounding world.

Marketing and disgust are the founding forces behind stereotypes. I propose that marketing can reveal and assert the unnatural nature of stereotypes and the unstable nature of the disgust that cause them. "Through teaching regarding disgust and its objects, societies potently convey attitudes towards animality, mortality, and related aspects of gender and sexuality" (Nussbaum 96). In this quote, Nussbaum reveals that disgust is culturally and historically dependent; it is taught, not inherent in the human mind. The impact of this is that the objects or situations that are perceived as disgusting and why, and therefore what is stigma and why, change according to the cultural system an individual finds herself in. Therefore, marketing strategies that are based on disgust are revealed to be founded on relative structures. Above, I proposed that both authors form critical arguments towards cultural standards based on disgust, a disgust which is now revealed as fictional. Dunn's novel is central in this argument. "I've wished I had two heads. Or that I was invisible. I've wished for a fish's tail instead of legs. I've wished to be more special" (Dunn 34), Olympia says, wanting to become a character in a fairy tale. To make his carnival flourish and come to life Al Binewski began experimenting with drugs and different hormones to create freakish children that could be part of the show. Because these children are so different, even from their parents, I would argue that Al's fictions and stories are completely vital for the show to function. The Binewski children must see themselves on the basis of other norms than those

that are present in the general society, to be willing and able to partake in the carnival setting. Olympia's comment adds to the importance of stories and the concept of disgust towards those who are "normal," as she creates a visionary image of what she could have been and what she wants to become. Stories become the force which recreates Olympia and her siblings as normal in the system. Establishing and reaffirming certain normative gender and identity standards through words is therefore crucial for both Al Binewski and Joichi Ueno as they need people to adhere to specific human norms to be able to expand their businesses.

In other words, by describing a family which is so widely different, and which contests in itself how the outside society defines people, Dunn reveals this extreme focus on stereotypes constructed through fiction. Embedded in her critique is also a reaffirmation of the view that marketing and marketing techniques are equally fake and fictional, because they are, in line with the cultural norms, created with a goal in mind; having someone buy your goods. Consequently, as marketing is presented as a factor which disturbs and hinders the individualities of women, ethnic minorities and the disabled, marketing is equally part of the creation of harming, normative stereotypes. In presenting the Binewski family as "norms" who consider those different from them as "freaks," Dunn reveals that disability is a relative, human made and culturally constructed concept. Moreover, these concepts are powerful because they are created through fictions, and their power is enhanced through a constant reaffirmation of the fictional stories that have created them.

However, Jane realises the nature of the relative stereotypes throughout her process of making the TV-show, and she begins a process of finding different wives, wives that do not conform to Joichi's narrow vision of the sanitised women that he wants to present the meat. Jane states that:

The program [about Lara and Dyann] was uplifting, a powerful affirmation of difference, of race and gender and the many faces of motherhood, and I was filled with a moral certitude that would sustain me through the fight I knew would ensue when Ueno found out that I'd gone and shot a biracial vegetarian lesbian couple (177).

Jane's development as seen in the quote above, suggests that she is aware of being part of defining limiting standards for women in the process of making *My American Wife!*. As an antidote, she attempts to make her own mark on the TV-show. In contrast with Joichi, Jane realises that truth cannot be presented in a sanitised version; instead, Jane sees that there are many different versions of the same truth, hidden in "the many faces of motherhood." What are defining elements for some, do not matter for others, and this contrast is stressed in the quote above, I propose. Truth is therefore an area which is up for discussion and debate in *My*

Year of Meats. The discussion concerning different versions of truth is a debate between two widely different cultural forces, symbolised by Jane on the one hand and Joichi on the other.

In Dunn's novel truth is also questioned as being highly subjective: "'Truth' was Elly's favourite set of brass knuckles, but she didn't necessarily know the whole elephant" (Dunn 114). Here, Dunn highlights that the concept of truth is difficult, if not impossible to define. Nevertheless, it is used as a powerful weapon by those who are able to set the definitions for the given truth through fiction and stories. The characters in the two novels are widely different from each other; still they all attempt to define standards for individual identification. Consequently, Dunn and Ozeki both question if a truth concerning individuality and personal expressions must also be relative and subjective, when stereotypes are relative and subjective definitions. "Truths" will always be based on personal and individual standards and emotions. Therefore, both truth and identity become fluid concepts, as these are bound together in a constant process of redefining each other in societies that are defined and constructed on concepts related to stereotypes.

Although Jane begins to see these processes, a concept connected to marketing is still at the basis of her vision of American women, as she wants to market *her* version of contemporary American women to the world. Therefore, Ozeki points a sceptical finger towards Jane's attempt to define a new standard for the women she portrays in the show. However, because Ozeki presents Jane as being to some extent aware of the fluid nature of truth and cultural definitions that she is part of, Jane can have an important role in *My Year of Meats* when it comes to discussing the concept of truths.

I was upset. I may have been glib in my pitch and clumsy in my initial dealings with the wives, but I honestly believed I had a mission. Not just for some girl in the next millennium, but for here and now. I have spent so many years, in both Japan and America, floundering in a miasma of misinformation about culture and race, I was determined to use this window into mainstream network television to *educate*. Perhaps it was naïve, but I believed, honestly, that I could use wives to sell meat in the service of a Larger Truth (27).

Monica Chiu proposes that the ways in which Jane has constructed her notion of multiculturalism in America is based on a mediation of the already constructed sense of America (101). Combined with the notions of marketing I described above, I propose that Ozeki underlines in her novel that behind every "truth" lurks an agenda. In addition to being subjective, truth is also marked by personal or structural concerns. As noted in the quote above, Jane believes she can use wives to sell meat in the service of a Larger Truth. The

Larger Truth has a goal: to educate and inform the Japanese people, and others, of how America “really is.” At the same time, Joichi and Beef-Ex attempt to build an altogether different picture of America, which does not include multicultural expressions and different types of people. Their agenda is to portray a way of life that will lead consumers to eat more meat; *their* America consists of seemingly perfect, white families. As a result, mediated truths cannot be trusted, due to their relative value based on personal goals and/or marketing incentives. Ozeki's underlines in this the dangers that lurk behind the created concepts of truth created by discursive practices. These dangers come to show in both *My Year of Meats* and *Geek Love*, and in the following I will discuss the nature and implications of them.

According to Chiu, meanings that are appended to cultural capital change and alter as the capital is moved across borders (106), and this change is illustrated by the shift in the view on American beef as harmful when it was banned by Europe, because of its high hormone levels, and healthy when it is promoted to Japanese customers. In Ozeki's contrast between the glorious portrayal of beef provided by Beef-Ex and the horrific depiction of the production methods that Jane has filmed, the change in meaning is underlined, and the process of change is aided by mediated images: fictions. The same changes in meaning apply to the images of the women that are televised and consumed through *My American Wife!*. I propose that the traditional patriarchal family values that are presented in the text to a great extent hinder and harm women in America. Nevertheless, this normative pattern is exported to Japan as a positive way of life and a mould in which Japanese women should try to fit. In the same way as American beef, filled with hormones, is conveyed as being healthy and positive, so are the images of the American Wives, turning the actual harming situation into positive images. Since the audience who consumes the images are unaware of their effects, the harming effect is enhanced. Ironically, women like Suzie Flowers and Bunny Dunn, two of Jane's American Wives, are presented on the show as being in control over their own lives, rulers of their homes, having docile husbands and beautiful children in their happy lives as home makers (Ozeki 11). Reality provides a rather different picture: they have no control over how they are presented and live. The stereotypical façade hides the ugly basis that make up the foundation of stereotypes, where the glorification of the meat industry is symbolic of the glorification of the stereotypical, perfect and angel-like woman. The negative effects of blindly trusting culturally established truths that define people as able in varying degrees, is highlighted in this contrast between the two stories which both profess to tell the truth but which show highly different “realities.”

Similarly, the ways in which Arturo presents his mutated body as a powerful force to outsiders, making his audience want to enter his clan of amputees is in equal manners presenting an image of a given reality. Having no limbs, Arturo is totally dependent on help, yet he presents himself as powerful and vital. Those who become members of his clan and go through the whole process of amputations become helpless patients, forever dependent on the care of those who are still able-bodied. Ironically, the followers become disabled subjects to escape the stereotypes they cannot live up to in the world outside the clan. Instead of becoming disabled in the outside world, they actively become “freaks” as a contrast to the traditional stereotypes. The amputees believe they will meet peace and insight, and become full human beings. Instead, they are stowed away in homes all over the country, having no individuality left, always dependent on the help of others. The reality behind Arturo's version of truth is revealed to be as harmful as the story of beef and hormone exposure. The critique that is most prominent in both *Geek Love* and *My Year of Meats* is therefore a comment on the negative outcome of relying on these unstable definitions of disgust to define others and oneself based on aspects related to physical bodies and bodily expressions. Both novels reveal, importantly *through* their insistence on stereotypes, that these are created and fake. As a result, trusting the defined truths will cause a further subjugation for some and increased financial gain for others.

In other words, normative images transported to other cultures are envisioned as positive in both novels by the male characters. Both Beef-Ex and Al Binewski make money from selling these images of people, and their structural power is enhanced when they are upheld as positive truths. The power that lies inherent in Joichi's and Al's media images and stories is immense. Consequently, Dunn and Ozeki present a never-ending circle which causes further disability due to the powerful imagery of what aspects that create the perfect body. Therefore, bodies rendered disordered by the dominant culture remains so in the economic and cultural system of disability (Riddell and Watson 6), because of the inability to escape the norms, as these are enhanced by the system itself through storytelling and fictions. Consumers are urged to adopt truths and internalise these stories in their minds and bodies, symbolised by the Arturan clan and the crucial difference in Beef-Ex's and Jane's meat stories. The negative effect of trusting the standards that are based on fictions is an endless inability to escape the norms. As a result, these norms are enhanced both from within the system itself, and by those who interpret the message on the other side of the borders.

Disordered bodies – a Possible Empowerment?

You've got yourself a little old disability there[...] You're like a man with a beautiful voice taking a vow of silence. [...] You're just going along with what *they* want you to do. *They* want those things hidden away, disguised, forgotten, because they know how much power those stumps could have (Dunn 169-170).

David Palumbo-Liu proposes that minor groups attempt to represent themselves through “rhetorics, discursive formulations, poetics” (43) to motivate people to act “sanely and humanely” (43) towards them. Because the cultural structures in the two novels are based on fictions and voice, stereotypes are defined on the basis of stories, language and texts. The established images of gender roles and stereotypes are therefore revealed as fictional. The authors both pose the question: is it possible to define a true concept of identity, gender and disability, and if so, what are the possible dangers of such a definition? I propose that the female characters attempt to find ways of being healthy, female and empowered, as an answer to the structure of disorder and disability and in a search to establish new and functioning identities.

Earlier I argued against Michael Hardin's argument that in *Geek Love* the “mutated body is desired and empowered” (338) with the conclusion that neither the perfect nor the mutated body gains power within the given cultural structures. However, Hardin proposes that mutilated bodies are empowered because they offer something to strive towards for those who are normal. They become what normal people would like to be, parodying the general concern with perfection that is found in American society, and the thriving businesses which have evolved as a result of the urge for perfection. According to Hardin, “freaks” can have the function of both reconstructing certain boundaries, at the same time as they can “affirm such boundaries” (337). In the following I will consider how Jane and Olympia attempt to negotiate their “freakishness” to gain power over their bodies and lives.

Jane and Olympia are both described as different and slightly freaky in appearance. Jane is tall, lanky and American-Japanese. She states that her tallness makes her “a freak. After living [in Japan] for a while, I simply gave up trying to fit in: I cut my hair short, dyed chunks of it green, and spoke in men's Japanese. It suited me. Polysexual, polyracial, perverse” (Ozeki 9). Jane is defined as both feminine and masculine, as a result she does not fulfil the cultural norm of what women shall be like according to the given stereotype: the extreme female, wife and mother. In addition, she works in a business dominated by men. Furthermore, due to her masculine like appearance, Jane is able to negotiate the world of

capitalist production to some extent, I propose. She takes part as an active worker, aided by her difference and strangeness:

Being racially 'half' – neither here nor there – I was uniquely suited to the niche I was to occupy on the television industry...it seems I was more useful as a go-between, a cultural pimp, selling off the vast illusions of America to a cramped population on that small string of Pacific islands (9).

The physical dubiousness of her gender and race allows her to negotiate the system of gender stereotypes as well as the structure of disorders and disability. However, Jane has disorder, and I propose that this symbolises that she is also inscribed by the world of production. She has a deformed uterus because her mother was given DES, an oestrogen, when she was pregnant. Jane's mother, a Japanese woman, was not believed to be able to give birth to a healthy, big child, much because of notions connected to her ethnicity. Stereotypes were therefore the reason for prescribing DES to her. As a result, Jane is also disordered by the impact of stereotypes, and is in many ways part of the world of women and disorders.

Therefore, I argue that although Jane manages to negotiate the world of capitalist production, she is still part of a sexualised world where she is somewhat unable to truly redefine women's roles. Jane has some power within the system because she is different from the stereotype; however, she is also in some ways part of reaffirming these. Being weird is not sufficient to truly becoming redefined as an individual. Jane states that suddenly “everyone looked weird, just like me” (Ozeki 9), underlining that “weird” is a definition like any other, caused by equally fictional standards for gender, race and individual expressions. Jane's inability to conceive can be seen as a symbol of her dubiousness; her disorder is symbolically caused by her not being completely “female” according to the given standard. Her freakishness is therefore both empowering and subjugating.

Olympia Binewski is, as I described earlier, not quite special enough within the carnival system. She is looked down upon by her brother and sisters because she is unable to make as much money as they do; she is in many ways a disabled pariah within the Binewski carnival. Nonetheless, Olympia holds highly her own position, because she is different from the norms, different from the outside world, even though she is less different than her siblings. Olympia says that the siblings are all “unique. We are masterpieces. Why would I want us to change into assembly-line items? The only way people can tell you apart is by your clothes” (Dunn 282). Her definition of herself and her siblings is based on being different from the norm, underlining the fictional nature of the stereotypes that have been created by her father, at the same time as she reaffirms these stereotypes. Based on this, I propose that in trying to

oppose one fictional structure, both Jane and Olympia create another.

When she is thinking about establishing a relationship with her daughter, Miranda, who is unaware of their blood relation, Olympia asks herself: “Am I contaminating her? [...] Dangling the axe over her whole existence of herself?” (Dunn 26). By presenting Olympia in both the “freak” and the “norm” world, Dunn creates an interesting tool for highlighting the structures linked to opposing stereotypes. Olympia is freakish both in the Binewski carnival and in the normal world; her difference is therefore always seen in contrast to the defined norms and stereotypes. Her presence underlines the general fear for the different, the strange and unknown in society, strengthening the power disgust has in the prevailing cultural systems that are described in Dunn's novel. “Papa is a genius” (Dunn 92), Olympia says, trying to define her value. At the same time, Olympia is stating her difference, a difference which is founding for both the disgust that the Binewski family creates within their own system and the disgust which makes her deviant in the world outside the carnival.

It follows, then, that Jane and Olympia, both defined as freaks in many ways, look to the wrong tools to establish an individual redefinition of themselves as healthy, women and individual. The “disabled body has often been constructed as 'the monstrous body' [...] where the monster [...] has always determined the outer limits of community within western imaginations” (Erevelles 97). Erevelles' argument sheds light on the fact that Jane and Olympia, in their similar attempts to differ themselves from the prevailing norms, and in their slightly disabled bodies (from the standpoint of the norms they negotiate within) become monsters who help determine the limits of the cultural normativity, instead of opening these borders up. In creating oppositions to the present system, they only work to reaffirm the given structures, and as a result, they strengthen the presence of stereotypes. Jane and Olympia become the contaminants that the forces behind the stereotypes attempt to hold at arm's length: “The very presence of the mentally handicapped and the physically disabled in our communities, functioning in the public eye, has often occasioned disgust” (Nussbaum 79). By being freaks in the system, Jane and Olympia remake and redefine disgust as part of, and central to, their social relationship with the world.

On the one hand, by only being “freakish,” as Michael Hardin suggests, I propose that individuals cannot truly gain power within the system, but will only work towards enhancing the power structures which leave them in no control over their own bodies and how these are defined. On the other hand, I propose that mutations and disorders can prove to be a powerful tool for individual redefinitions, but I argue that this calls for a restructuring of the fictions that define some as freakish and other as norms. Because, although Jane's freakishness is both

subjugating and empowering, I argue that Ozeki's main focus lies on the fact that Jane is actually quite powerful in the system in which she operates.

Earlier in this chapter I discussed how women become consumers of their own housewifization. Further, I proposed that the female characters are crucially important players in the capitalist system. As consumers, they reaffirm the image of the stereotypes that limit them by wanting to become and embody the stereotype. Ozeki especially presents women as important factors in the process of making the TV-show, underlining that the way they respond is vital for the survival of it, and hence for Joichi's position in Beef-Ex. That women consume an image of the housewife and her role and internalise these norms is therefore extremely important for people like Joichi to keep their capital investments. Disability studies have investigated the dichotomy between dependence and independence (Tisdall 26), and in this system, the consumer is given an important role. The consumer makes herself dependent on some products that she is presented with, and at the same time, she strengthens her need for these products and her husband's money to buy them, making herself independent. Consumerism is therefore at the core of the dependence/independence dichotomy.

However, although the argument above is a bleak presentation of the results of marketing, women, by being consumers in the system, can actually provide a force which can change what is being portrayed, even though they are powerless in the creation of the images that they consume. Joichi's obsession with Akiko's questionnaires, which she is meant to fill out after each episode of *My American Wife!*, points to this potential consumer impact. In the following discussion he underlines how important her comments are, if they are "right." More importantly, his comments underline that Akiko is in a position to redefine the terms "Authentic," "Wholesome" and "Delicious" (78):

[Akiko:] 'I gave them a very low mark in Wholesomeness....'

[Joichi:] 'Yes, but you gave them a nine in Authenticity.'

Akiko hung her head. [...] [Joichi:] 'So what you are saying is that your evaluation has nothing to do with true Authenticity. It's just arbitrary numbers based on your own questionable and subjective tastes.

Is that right?' [...] [Joichi:] 'I guess we won't have to waste time with these anymore, then. If that's all it is, if I can't trust you to give me accurate and reliable impressions, then it's simply a waste of time' (130).

When Akiko voices her scepticism towards the terms that Joichi argues are stable, she undermines the concept that is crucial for the stereotypical system: the belief that there is one standard or truth that can define all human beings as either/or. What is interesting is that Akiko realises this. Joichi says: "That stupid American coordinator. She goes and shoots the

husband cooking! Husbands aren't supposed to cook. The show is called *My American Wife!* 'Well it's nice for a change...', Akiko started, then thought better of it. 'But of course you're right, it makes no sense'" (78). Because she knows that Joichi will react violently to her objections, she does not speak out. As a result, Akiko does not create an opposition to the stereotype.

According to Sheila Riddell and Nick Watson, "disabled people have forged their own cultures as acts of resistance. Culture, therefore, is both a source of oppression and of liberation for disabled people" (2). I propose that this argument asserts that being defined as disabled can also be a possible way of redefining yourself as an individual. Joichi's questionnaires become an image of how Akiko, as disordered woman, tries to reformulate her view on the world outside of Joichi's one-sided cultural constructs. Her internal opposition to the terms Joichi has defined is the beginnings of an attempt to reformulate her own culture. Akiko's fear underlines the power she potentially has as a consumer, because she realises that she cannot reveal this potential power to Joichi.

Based on this, I would argue that the two authors investigate and shed light on how gender based definitions can be taken to another level, a new culture. Jane's polysexual and polyracial appearance allows her to communicate across the borders of gender and racial standards, and Ozeki has, in Jane, created a tool for cultural and racial exchange on this new level. In the ability to negotiate across borders of race and gender, Jane has established a certain type of power which is different both to men's power and women's (lack of) power in *My Year of Meats*. In her article "Crossing the Border. The Post-Colonial Carnival in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*," Catherine Wynne describes a woman who has always been the underdog in a male dominated group. Having no true power, she has occupied the role of mediator within the organisation. Interestingly, this woman is able to take sexual control and earns greater credibility within the organisation when she takes on masculine clothes and colours. According to Wynne, "her masculine gender identification empowers her political position" (150-2). Jane is able to take this gender identification and remake it as a tool for re-envisioning her identity: "In life, [Jane is] the most competent person [she] know[s]" (90). The significance of this is, I propose, that although it is difficult to establish a functional, not fictional redefinition of gender and identity, Ozeki underlines the possibility that mutated and different bodies can actually be the factor that causes a change in the stereotypical images of women. When Jane becomes so different that she does not only serve as an opposition to the stereotype but becomes a total "other," she can, just in power of being herself point to a possible change in normative images. Bodies are crucial for this process, and Lily's comment

about her children, having power “just by being themselves” (Dunn 7) is given new meaning in this context. The true power of being different is a possible renegotiation of norms and stereotypes. “Only the true Freak challenges the conventional boundaries between male and female, sexed and sexless, animal and human, large and small, self and other” (Fiedler 24). In this context, the freaks attempt exactly this. Combined with Hardin's argument that mutated bodies are empowered (338), the power in the bodies of minority groups can therefore be said to lie in their extreme difference from the established norm. In being so different from the stereotype that the norms themselves need to be questioned, mutated bodies can gain power.

As I discussed earlier, Akiko's bulimia is a vivid example of how stereotypes become disorders. More interesting than this, I propose that the inscription of the disorder due to cultural norms and expectations on Akiko's body can be seen as a tool to gain control not necessarily over her body, but in her violent marriage, the culture which surrounds her. As Bordo argues, disorders in women could be seen as a protest against the cultural norms that are inscribed on their bodies (175), a vital argument in this context. If Akiko is bulimic, she is unable to eat the meat that Joichi urges her to eat. As a result, he will not have sex with her because her periods are gone: “it began in her stomach, like an animal alive, and would climb its way back up her gullet, until it burst from the back of her throat. She could not contain it. She could not keep any life down inside her” (Ozeki 37-8). It is in this discussion that the physical impact of Akiko's role as consumer becomes crucial. Akiko is presented by Ozeki as unable to consume Joichi and Beef-Ex's mediated picture of women, and as a result, she cannot be totally inscribed with his norms and stereotypes. Her disorder is then not caused by the urge to become the stereotype, but rather it becomes a rejection of the stereotype itself. By throwing up the meat Joichi forces her to cook and eat, and attempts to gain power over her with, Akiko empowers herself. She cannot take part in the role as consumer of her own housewifization. Her body controls what can enter her body, both Joichi's food and sperm, through its inability to consume.

Ironically and interestingly, Joichi's meat, which he considers to be clean and uncontaminated, functions as a disgusting object for Akiko; her body does not allow it to penetrate her borders and contaminate her. Akiko's body perceives that the cultural norms, presented by Joichi's sperm, are damaging and destroying, while Akiko really is still unaware of this. Therefore, the male becomes the contaminant to the clean, female body. Disgust becomes a powerful tool which does not only define others as unclean, but helps Akiko in staying clean. The contaminant is seen as the opposite from what is has usually been, namely the old-fashioned male norms which have traditionally defined the borders for disgust and

disability. In other words, Akiko's rejection of what is culturally "clean," becomes the symbol of how disgust defines stereotypes. At the same time, the relativity of disgust is asserted as vitally important when Akiko's body changes the definition of the contaminant. Now, disgust highlights the oppression which is aimed towards people with disabilities and women within the system. Ozeki presents disgust as a force which no longer subjugates those who are not culturally perfect. Rather, disgust becomes empowering for those who have been oppressed, in the process where their different bodies reject the contaminants, as I described in the discussion of Akiko and her situation. Akiko has become different and her body is other because she cannot internalise the standards Joichi attempts to apply to it. Hence, her body gains some sort of power.

The power that lies inherent in the disordered, seemingly weak body can be seen slightly differently when taking an even closer look at Akiko's situation. Her bulimia seems to be uncontrollable even to herself. It is as if her thinning body restrains itself from having Joichi's baby. As a result, Akiko cannot control how she gains power. This lack of control yet at the same time empowering process can be considered to be the result of an unconscious function. Akiko's body and women's bodies in general work to empower themselves in a cultural environment where men are largely in control. Akiko's mind takes unconsciously control over her body through bulimia, rendering her empowered because she is no longer inscribed with Joichi's meat and sperm. At the same time, she is without power, due to her lack of strength. Similar to Lily's situation, women's bodies change through disorders, and the individual in the body has no true control. As a result, the female characters have difficulties seeing beyond the physical disorder their bodies suffer from. The limiting stereotypes are still present, because the mind will not fully follow in the process. As a result, the new culture of the disabled is not fully established, because the individual mind must be active if the physical resistance is to be truly powerful. Akiko does not become a true freak (Fiedler 24), and the norms are not questioned on the basis of her body. However, Ozeki points to the body as a possible source for power, underlined by Akiko's struggle with disorder and cultural stereotypes.

Patrice DiQuinzio states that feminism "has to rely on individualism in order to articulate its claims that women are equal human subjects of social and political agency and entitlement" (xii). Although standing together as a group can lead to empowerment in a struggle, *only* being defined on the basis of your group affiliation is also limiting, because it can erase personal and individual forms of expression. Defining yourself solely on the basis of a group will in the end prove futile, making individual progression difficult to achieve. Group

definitions are vulnerable to new stereotypes, because a group construct in many ways invites stereotypical expectations of the group's members. When Jane attempts to send out “a truly affirming message about sexuality and race and the many faces of motherhood” (212), Ozeki underlines that the women were still chosen and edited to be the right part of Jane's narrative. Jane tries to create a new group definition. Akiko trusts Jane's shows, and look to them for inspiration (Ozeki 129-30), and this may be a reason why she is unable to become completely powerful. Trusting “truths” is underlined as harming in this description of Akiko, leading to her being corrected violently by her husband. Based on this I would argue that Ozeki and Dunn may be seen to question what kind of voice must be used to re-envision individual truths. The choice is between a group's collective rhetoric or single, individual expressions.

Riddell and Warren state that during “the 1990s, more complex and contested theories of identity have emerged. Post-structuralist thinkers have emphasised that, far from possessing one simple fixed identity, individuals are constantly engaged in negotiating identity” (10). Earlier, I argued that the truths we find in the two novels must be contested as they are fictional depictions of normative stereotypes and cultural structures. With this in mind, I would argue that Dunn and Ozeki present characters in a constant struggle to redefine themselves as individuals, based on relative and fluid “truths” that are applied to bodies and individual expressions. Portraying two distinct and very different cultures, both set in America, within the time space of approximately twenty years, the two novels and authors shed light on this relative value of truth, as none of the fictions state that they are true, or attempt to be. The novels are part of a multicultural and feminist literature which crosses borders. It can be argued that the novels set out on a mission of defining and describing concepts that are adopted across these borders. However, at the same time as literature and art can convey how these types of power systems and cultural norms function in society, they can also be part of the construction and reaffirmation of the cultural stereotypes that I have argued hinder the female characters in finding identities based on their own personal truths: The authors' images can also be changed and altered as they cross borders. Physical bodies become the only stable concept in the novels, although they are affected by stereotypes and normative images. In this context, the power of physical disordered bodies is to shed light on the relative value of truth.

Chapter 2

Women, Meat and Motherhood

Of course the “Wife of the Week” is important too. She must be attractive, appetizing, and all-American. She is the Meat Made Manifest: ample, robust, yet never tough of hard to digest. Through her, Japanese housewives will feel the hearty sense of warmth and comfort, of hearth and home – the traditional family values symbolized by red meat in rural America (Ozeki, *My Year of Meats* 8).

Mumpo was eating the twins. [...] They grew frail and thin and bony except for the four breasts that ballooned every three hours in time for Mumpo to wake. [...] Mumpo grew, spreading around himself in looping, creased pools of pinkness that pulsed with his breathing (Dunn, *Geek Love* 309-10).

Introductory Remarks

Patrice DiQuinzio suggests that there is a debate in America which has increased “the difficulty of women's decision making about motherhood and the public debate about the relative value of women's varied options concerning motherhood” (vii). She further states that meanings concerning the effects of motherhood differ. Some say that the experience is limiting and oppressive due to the female biological body and male control, others argue that motherhood is important for a female identity and accomplishment. Others again say that motherhood is the basis for women's value in society and therefore an impetus for women's political participation. Furthermore, it is argued that motherhood is a uniting experience for women (ix). The theme of motherhood is crucial for women's development in the two novels, I argue, because this theme points to the development and reconceptualisation of women's identity, a central aspects in the novels. Different issues and realities concerning motherhood are present in the two novels; hence reproduction and mothering are crucial, in many ways, for the lives of the female characters. This applies both to a reconceptualisation in terms of individuals' subjectivity and for women as a group within cultures that are based on fluid discourses and stereotypes. I propose that both authors present motherhood as a central phenomenon for women to regain control over. At the same time, the concept of motherhood becomes as fluid as truth and identity due to the many forces which attempt to control how reproduction is executed by both men and women in the two novels.

DiQuinzio's argument that “feminism has found it impossible to theorize mothering

adequately in terms of an individualist theory of subjectivity” (xii) is important in this context, I propose. Mothering and motherhood can be central for the definition of women as individuals. At the same time, motherhood as a group definition may be the source of both strength and subjugation caused by stereotypes: “Essential motherhood represents mothering and femininity in terms that are at odds with subjectivity as individualism defines it and so it has the effect of excluding mothers and women from individualist subjectivity” (DiQuinzio xiii). Essential motherhood is, according to DiQuinzio, the notion that women are naturally mothers, and that women are not complete and fulfilled as women unless they have experienced mothering. She states that individualism is gender neutral and that for women to be equally subjective on the same terms as men, they cannot be defined on the basis of essential motherhood. Applying this concept to women will exclude an inherent subjectivity before (and to some extent after) mothering and the concept also hinders those women who either do not want or cannot have children from gaining that subjectivity. In addition, essential motherhood pre-empts that women are heterosexual and that a female sexuality is only enjoyed for means of reproduction, not for pleasure (xi-xiii). The validity of the concept of essential motherhood is questioned by both authors, as they present female characters who respond differently to the definition of women as mothers. Essential motherhood is bound to a unitary group definition, causing a stereotypical outlook on female bodies. One of my main arguments will be that a free choice concerning how, when and if a woman becomes “mother” is an important predicament for both authors. Whether the women in the texts are unable or able to make this free choice is decisive for the female characters' individual development and identity when they are faced with oppression and stereotypes.

Susan Bordo have investigated statistics and argues that in American culture in the 1990s, “the pregnant, poor woman comes as close as a human being can get to being regarded, medically and legally, as 'mere body,' her wishes, desires, dreams, religious scruples of little consequence and easily ignored” (76). Bordo investigates in her book *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* jurisdictional and social aspects linked to women's experience of pregnancies and motherhood that define women as “mere bodies” instead of individual subjects. In this chapter I will argue how these connotations render the female characters, and especially women of child-bearing age, subject for definitions that make them less human and more animal. Combined with an examination of the meat industry, women who are “mere bodies” are, in both novels, also likened to and compared with meat and cattle. Using the disordered female body and drug (ab)use as symbols, both authors point to aspects where women have the same status as farm animals, and are in many ways only

meant to produce babies for men's financial and personal gain.

Ozeki presents women who struggle with feeling less valued because they are not mothers, due to the fact that essential motherhood is part of the prevailing stereotype for women in *My Year of Meats*. On this basis, I will discuss Akiko's and Jane's disorders and other female characters' hypothetical willingness to reduce their healthy bodies to disordered bodies to be able to conceive. These events will, I propose, symbolise and underline that the combination “healthy, empowered and mother” is impossible to achieve for women in the prevailing discourse of gender normativity that rules the text. Ozeki presents an image of women as being, because of the cultural expectation of motherhood, rendered as either passive agents under the will of men, or active yet disordered women; they are never seen or regarded as complete. Dunn, too, presents a world where women are called by different names when they are mothers, which again pinpoints a loss of a female identity when women are faced with motherhood. As a result, many of the mothers in the novels are passive receivers of cultural realities, rather than being active agents and actors.

Based on these factors, I would argue that reproduction and motherhood are presented by both authors as central aspects for a discussion concerning female individuality and a re-contextualisation of female identity. Reproduction is a source for female oppression and violation, yet at the same time, the reproductive body can also be a powerful tool for a female liberationist project, if women can actively gain control over the reproductive body. As bodies are central for reproduction, reproduction itself becomes a symbol for imposing unwanted situations upon the body. As a result, reproductive choice symbolises not only the choice to become mother or not, but also the ability to stay in physical power over one's own body. By questioning a harmful combination of women as incomplete if childless and still incomplete if they are mothers, Ozeki's novel calls for a cultural environment where biological progeny is not demanded for women to become complete human beings. Paradoxically, the way out of this cultural expectation is, I propose, not through healthy female bodies, but rather through taking control over factors concerning disorder and disease connected to reproduction. This can prove to change how the female body is defined. Through their characters, both Dunn and Ozeki present a struggle to redefine the female body. In this discussion, they propose that a female reconceptualisation can be viable when reproduction is used as a tool in a process of empowerment.

To investigate these issues I will develop my discussion of disgust from chapter one, based on Martha Nussbaum's theories. Nussbaum uses Erving Goffman's concept of stigma in

her discussion and I will employ a definition of stigma which includes disgust and contamination. Stigma is based on disgust, where the stigmatised subject is a person who has been contaminated by the disgusting, especially through oral or anal penetration (of certain foods, substances, illness etc.) The mouth seems to be the border which is most easily contaminated. Therefore, if unwanted substances enter the mouth, stigma is almost certain to follow. In *My Year of Meats*, this concept is connected to different kinds of meat and eating. Further, stigma and disgust are connected, according to Nussbaum, to the fear of decay and the animal. Male bodies are therefore portrayed as being strong and powerful to define a contrast to animal decay. “The man of steel” is a potent vision of this. Contrastingly, female bodies are more closely connected to the animal due to reproduction, with all that this entails: menstruation, pregnancy, giving birth. All are potential dangerous situations, which link women more closely to decay and death than men (Nussbaum 74-88).

Furthermore, Nussbaum points to the fact that European birth rates have fallen, largely, one believes, due to the fact that modern women have the opportunity to work outside the home, and are unwilling to enter unions that will work to their disadvantage (260). Erevelles' notion of housewifization, that I discussed in chapter one, gains therefore another perspective, which goes hand in hand with Joichi's project for *My American Wife!*. Industrialisation lead to “housewifization” which affirmed women as economically dependent on men, and therefore marked them as “naturally inferior” (Erevelles 101-2). A further industrialisation process, where women are part of the equation both as consumed “meat” and consumers of the meat will therefore build up under the concept of the traditional family: husband, wife and children; Joichi's goal. This process will hinder a further decline in birth rates. If a cultural process which enhances this union as natural continues, the normalisation of women as essential mothers will prevail, and again render women as mere bodies, rather than individual subjects.

I began the introduction to this thesis with a quote from Catherine Wynne: she argues that power must rest in the body (152). Leigh Johnson presents a similar argument: “women's bodily security, both inside and outside the home, affects how much control an individual woman has over her reproduction” (32). The female characters in the two texts I investigate in this thesis have no real power over their own bodies, since these are used by transnational and familiar power systems where bodies are regarded as means for capital gain and consumption. Thus, their bodies are in many ways powerless. In this chapter I propose that the two authors look to find a way out of the present situation for their characters, a move away from the

situation where they are in danger of becoming mere bodies. The locus of power lies in the physical body, and the female characters must regain a consciousness regarding reproduction, both as individuals and as a group, to negotiate the prevailing structures. In this chapter I will investigate how reformulating contaminating factors and disordered bodies can enable the female protagonists to regain some of the control they have lost in the process of housewifization. According to Bordo “two different traditions have been established, one for the embodied subject, and the other for those who come to be treated as mere bodies despite an official rhetoric that vehemently forswears such treatment of human beings” (72). Regaining the status of pregnant women and mothers from mere bodies to individual subjects is therefore, I would argue, what is at stake in the two texts I investigate.

Women, Meat and Motherhood

In chapter one, I discussed how women are categorised as somewhat disordered due to stereotypical expectations, at the same time as they are exploited for financial gain in a system built upon capitalist modes of production. Monica Chiu argues that the “American Dream is reserved for those who set the parameters of consumption, not for those consumed in the process. The drive for profit detrimentally affects the production of minorities as well as the reproductive use of women's bodies” (111). As a result, the disordered female body is linked to aspects of reproduction. As those who gain in the system set the parameters for how minorities, the “othered,” are produced, women who differ from the norm are and remain deviant and unproductive. Lily's comment that the greatest gift one can give to one's children is to enable them to make money in power of being themselves in *Geek Love* gains an important level of meaning. It is not the children that can make money “just by being themselves” (7), rather, those who gain are the ones who control the perimeters of bodily production. Furthermore, Chiu describes the way in which meat became a symbol of power in cultures where the “intellectually superior” (usually white, rich men) were urged to eat meat (103). Meat was meant for male consumption, in the same way as bodies, in “being themselves,” cause capital gain through consumption, for those who are able to control how people are “themselves.”

Disturbingly, women are likened to meat and animals in connection with pregnancy and sexuality. Bordo presents this quote from a judge in a court case concerning a woman wanting to have an abortion, an act that her boyfriend protests: “[...] 'she is a very pleasant young lady, slender in stature, healthy, and well able to carry a baby to delivery' [...] Are we in

a courtroom, or at an auction prize for heifers?" (93). Considering Bordo's comment to what the judge said, in combination with Chiu's theory about meat, I propose that a system of meat and women appear in the two novels, where female bodies, reproduction and meat stand at the centre of consumption. In this way, women are both consumers and consumed in the two novels. They contribute to capital gain for the male characters, both from the consumption they perform and the ways in which they are objects for consumption. Consequently, meat plus women is the equation in which there is no room for women to be complete, healthy subjects, whether they are mothers or not. In the following, I will discuss how consumption and reproduction stand together and produce the female body as meat.

As I discussed in chapter one, Beef-Ex's vision of ultimate female perfection is symbolised in the former stripper Bunny Dunn. She is "balanced on the split-rail fence that surrounded her ranch house ... as amplitude personified, replete with meat, our ideal American Wife" (252). She is big breasted, attractive, blond, considerably well off and married to a much older man. Their income comes from the meat industry. Bunny Dunn carries all the physical signs of a body filled with oestrogen; big breasts, hips and curves in abundance, made for having children and pleasing men. Bunny Dunn confesses to have "just [been] following the direction these darn [breasts] pointed [her] in" (297): She has always provided services for men, either as a stripper or as a wife and mother, caring for her house and child. She has always been an object for sexual consumption. Ozeki pinpoints in her description of Bunny that, through the extreme focus on the physical female body, women are consumed as meat by men. Women become meat in Ozeki's world because they are measured in terms of what they can produce from their bodies: children, sexual experiences and marketing effects. Her name vividly referring to Playboy's infamous bunny logo, Bunny is the image of the stereotypical, sexual woman. At the same time, the Playboy reference evokes how women are presented culturally through media as objects for sexual consumption. Underlining the woman as sexually consumed is the stripper Joichi adores in Texas, who "offered up her round *rump* for his inspection" (*italics mine*) (43). Furthermore, the link between women and meat is strengthened in this quote, as the stripper is compared with a rump roast that only a little while before has been prepared and consumed in the text.

In *My Year of Meats*, the TV-show Jane produces presents female objects on the screen for a target audience consisting of women. The wives on the show are in second place, as Jane writes in her Meat Manifesto: "It's the meat (not the Mrs.) who's the star of our show!" (8). Al Binewski's comment from chapter one, points to another aspect in the discussion of women

and meat: “I mean your mama has what we refer to in the trade as LEGS – would do business no real harm” (5), he says. Dunn compares Lily's legs with animal body parts; both are discussed in terms of their physical value. Further, Lily's legs become the simile of the rump that the stripper offers Joichi in *My Year of Meats*. Both wives and meat are marketed, however, meat is fronted as being more important than the women, as it is asserted by Jane's manifest above and the focus on the physicality of legs in Al's comment. Women are not present in power of themselves and their abilities, but because of their ability to present delicious meat to consumers. What is most important is therefore not the women, and the way they are portrayed, but how the depiction of the women and their families affect the sales of meat in Japan and the ways in which the attractions in the Binewski carnival draw an audience. Based on this, women are objects offered for consumption by other women as well as men, because women are important participants in both audiences that are targeted in the two novels.

As consumed objects, the female characters that are portrayed in the novels are passive, at the same time as they aid in the transnational trade of meat and the Binewski economy. Furthermore, the female characters in *My Year of Meats* put themselves out for additional sexual consumption in their attempt to become the sexualised image of the American housewife. Since sexual bodies are a source for financial gain, the link between stereotypes, meat and women render the female characters prostituted by the system. Lily's body is the most potent example of this, as she is portrayed for her ability to sell products in power of her legs, at the same time as her body is used to make children for the carnival's financial profit. Her body is exploited for financial gain in two different ways.

Animal products are given other names than the actual animal to make the consumption of them more palatable for human beings. Similarly, in the process of televised consumption in Ozeki's novel, women are renamed as “wives.” The term makes them more palatable for consumption, since it already entails some sort of ownership. Following traditional patriarchal patterns, wives belong to a man and his household, and are with difficulty considered as fully individual subjects. Their place as housewives is more easily envisioned when they are a Mrs., not a woman with individual value based on her own individuality and name. Similarly, in *Geek Love*, Lily is called Mama or simply referred to as the boss' wife. Moreover, Mumpo, Iphy's son, changes her name to Little-Mama (301). Motherhood and reproduction are therefore important factors when it comes to creating women as something other than individuals. Through mothering, women are called other names, names that define them based on their relationship to another human being: a husband

or child. In other words, women are named according to their roles within social structures, the effect of which is that their bodies are more easily changed and manipulated for use in terms of production and consumption.

The link between meat and women at the scene of reproduction gains a more severe aspect than the concept of consumption when the two texts are compared in light of the use of drugs and hormones. In *My Year of Meats* women are affected by diethylstilboestrol, DES, a growth hormone injected into livestock to make cattle grow faster. A handy side-effect is that the heifers either abort foetuses, or are unable to become pregnant, to further fasten the fattening process of the meat. In addition, Ozeki mentions the ways in which the same drug was given to pregnant women in the 1950s and 60s to ensure that they gave birth to big, healthy children, paradoxically causing injuries to the children's reproductive systems. In *Geek Love*, Al Binewski uses hormones and other various drugs to control his (re)production. He gives them to his wife so he can control the outcome of the pregnancies and “breed his own freak-show” (7), directly linking drugs, hormones and female reproduction as the basis of a healthy consumption, when considered in financial terms. The dire consequence of the (ab)use of drugs in both *My Year of Meats* and *Geek Love* is that women's bodies, and their offspring, are harmed and disordered. Lily slowly disintegrates throughout Dunn's novel, but is able to have children. In Ozeki's text, Jane is affected by the DES her mother was prescribed with during pregnancy, destroying Jane's uterus and pre-disposing her to cancer. In drawing the connections between meat, reproduction and the effects of drugs, the two authors render the female characters with no power to define the use of their own bodies. This is due to both the cultural stereotypes I discussed in chapter one and the ways in which men meddle with female bodies by using technologies and drugs. As both cows' and women's bodies are open for interference and manipulation by drugs that affect their reproductive bodies, Wynne's argument that power must rest in the body (152) is linked clearly with the ideas of reproduction and procreation. Furthermore, the comparison of women and animals at the centre of reproduction is reaffirmed. Without any true control over these faculties, women are unable to reconceptualise a subjective personality. As a result, they cannot be defined, or define themselves, as individuals. The female characters are more “mere bodies” than individual subjects due to the role of male power in the realm of their reproduction.

Physical Violence, Disgust and Contamination

According to DiQuinzio,

the concept of mothering and the image of the mother represented in essential motherhood are perhaps the two most significant elements of dominant definitions of femininity, the determination of women's inequality and oppression, and the rationalization and justification of sexism and male dominance (4).

Being able to redefine the notion that women are not fulfilled as individuals before they have had children is vitally important in *My Year of Meats*, whereas finding ways to define oneself as a complete human being without contributing to capitalist modes of (re)production is crucial in *Geek Love*. At the same time, the notion of motherhood as a source of male dominance, as DiQuinzio argues above, is present in both novels. This creates a dichotomy between male and female control in the narratives. In the following I will discuss how Dunn and Ozeki attempt to find new ways out of the status quo, by investigating a possible empowerment through the reproductive aspects of women's bodies. The authors suggest that reproduction can be a source for both empowerment and subjugation for women. Being at the core of how women are used for consumption and as consumers and producers for male gain, reproduction can also serve as the necessary rhetorical tool to redefine a cultural concept of women, and I propose that the authors attempt this through their novels.

Susan Bordo argues that in the western tradition, an image of parenting has been applied which entails that he who mounts is the true parent (89), a statement which points to both cultural aspects and physical strength as parts of the cultural construct of parenting and concerns around reproduction. In addition, DiQuinzio states that in “industrial capitalist societies like the United States, the nuclear family in which women have primary responsibility for child rearing [...] is a crucial component of social organization and individual development” (viii). Because “Women as Mothers” is a prevailing stereotypical image in *My American Wife!*, and women are seen as economic commodities in both Dunn and Ozeki's novels, the connection between these two stereotypes and violence becomes clear. Stereotypical images of women lead to both indirect and direct violence towards women, where motherhood and reproduction serve as the starting point for this violence, in the context of the traditional nuclear family. The images of the active, mounting father will be important in the following discussion concerning violence and reproductive abilities.

Physical violence and cultural norms are intermeshed in the parallel development of

the content of *My American Wife!* and the level of Joichi's violence against Akiko: "As Jane films programs that diverge from what Joichi considers to be proper images of American women and American meat, he grows emotionally and physically abusive towards Akiko" (Black 232). Ozeki presents a strong link between who is in control of normative images and cultural systems, and the direct violence towards women. Joichi's violence increases in strength when the depicted women differ from his norm, and when Akiko reacts more positively towards these shows than to the ones Joichi is in charge of. When men, symbolised by Joichi, cannot control the cultural normativity and violate women through the power of these images, they turn to literal violence to affirm their superior position and shape and mould women into objects fitting their normative standards. The concept of normative images leading to and being a source for violence is demonstrated by Ozeki on a micro level in the description of Akiko and Joichi's relationship, and on a larger scale when the author is describing the exploitation of women by *My American Wife!* in Japan and America. In Japan, women become more and more invisible and suffer from an increasing amount of disorders due to these cultural normative images; they are literally losing their voices (Ozeki 87). In similar terms, the men in *Geek Love* use violence and physical control when the women in the family do not do as they are supposed to, that is when they act in other ways than what is expected in the system. Arturo hires the Bag-Man to look after the twins, so that they shall not do anything "stupid" (Dunn 238) and Olympia is violently attacked because she has a relationship with a "norm" and Arturo suspects that the child she is carrying is the boyfriend's. The most gruesome and brutal attack on the girls' bodily integrity is when Elly is lobotomised so that she can no longer pose a threat to the system Arturo and Al have developed (272). Dunn's bleak picture suggests that the consequence of women speaking against the cultural society in which they find themselves is that they are effectively silenced through physical violation. When men are in physical power, they are able to change and violate women's bodies to reaffirm that control, a tool they actively use when their established norms are being contested.

At the same time as men execute violence towards women, both through drugs and physical force, women are part of a symbolic type of violence connected to motherhood. A symbolic and self-inflicted violence caused by cultural expectations can be found in both texts. "There are so many young women who are desperate to have a baby, who would cut off an arm or a leg in order to conceive" (81) Akiko's doctor scolds her. Bordo quotes in her book a doctor who states that the majority of women he sees "would cut off their heads to save their babies" they are expecting (83). The image of giving up an arm or a leg, or more severely,

their heads, for the chance to have a baby creates the notion that women should be, and in fact are, willing to give up both their own bodily health and integrity to reproduce a child. The paradox of this voluntary, although symbolic, amputation lies in the contrast to the established notion of essential motherhood, where women are not truly female before they are mothers. Through the symbolic wish to cut off limbs to reach motherhood, women would lose some of their independent status as individual women in power of themselves, since their bodies would be incomplete and marked: Lacking an arm or a leg would render the women disabled. Thus, both through bulimia, DES, drugs and childlessness, and through losing limbs and having babies, women are rendered incomplete. This is symbolised by Akiko, who is not a complete woman when she cannot conceive; she is a “barren old witch” (238). Just as Akiko suffers from bulimia, Jane suffers from the disorder caused by DES which makes her unable to produce biological progeny. Akiko's and Jane's disorders combined with the hypothetical willingness other women express to reduce their healthy bodies to disordered bodies to be able to conceive, symbolise and underline that the combination “healthy, empowered and mother” is impossible to achieve for women in the prevailing discourse of gender normativity that rules *My Year of Meats*. Ozeki presents an image of women as being, because of the cultural expectation of motherhood, rendered as either passive agents under the will of the mounting men, or active yet disordered women, where both situations are caused by either literal or symbolic violence towards their bodies.

In somewhat similar terms does Olympia attempt to rise within the hierarchy Dunn has created, by becoming pregnant with Arturo's child. Having quite the opposite effect, pregnancy and motherhood degrade her in the culture because Arturo “saw no use for [Miranda, Olympia's daughter] and [the child] interfered with his use of [Olympia]” (315). Motherhood is therefore not a “tool” that will automatically remake the woman in question as a valuable human being. Nevertheless, women are symbolically prepared to hurt themselves to reach the status of motherhood. Dunn's presentation of Olympia's situation is therefore in opposition to Ozeki's presentation of women who are willing to reduce their bodies to become mothers. Dunn's description of Olympia's situation underlines that motherhood in itself will not cause a rise in either hierarchy or personal status. The symbolic violence women inflict upon themselves in Ozeki's novel is therefore futile, because the status as mothers will not really increase their value. They will still be somewhat disabled.

According to Martha Nussbaum, disgust, a causing factor of stigma

embodies a shrinking from contamination that is associated with the human desire to be nonanimal, it is frequently hooked up with various forms of shady social practice, in which the discomfort people feel over the fact of having an animal body is projected outwards onto vulnerable people and groups (74).

Further, “disgust concerns the borders of the body: it focuses on the prospect that a problematic substance can be incorporated into the self” (Nussbaum 88). Bakhtin argues that the grotesque body is marked as “ugly, monstrous, hideous” and filled with images of “copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, dismemberment” (quoted in Weese 350). Similarly, Nussbaum proposes that “women give birth, and are thus closely linked to the continuity of animal life and the mortality of the body” (111). Based on this, I argue that the female body is marked as stigmatised because of the ability to give birth, and women are therefore closely connected to the grotesque and the animal. At the same time, in the stereotypical world that Ozeki has created, women are seen as disgusting if they cannot conceive, because they do not contribute to social growth and financial gain. This is the reason why Akiko is a “barren, old witch” (238): she is woman, not working, not having children, with no value whatsoever. In other words, women are grotesque when they are seen through a lens of copulation, birth and pregnancy. On the other hand, when they are seen from the point of view of childlessness, they are incomplete and disabled because they do not contribute to capital production. As a result, violence is inflicted both upon women who become mothers and women who do not, either as disabling stigma or physical violence. In *Geek Love* the impossibility of being complete, healthy and woman is symbolised by Lily. She is a mother and has contributed to the capital growth in her husband's carnival, but still she disintegrates. The drugs she is given are contaminants which ironically, since the drugs are meant to control her reproduction for capital gain, render her disordered and disabled, unable to partake in production. In other words, the drugs remake her as grotesque and marked. This is the catch-22 of the discourse of motherhood represented in the two novels.

As drugs prescribed by men contaminate women's bodies, I would argue that sperm can be seen as an equally contaminating substance. According to Nussbaum, research suggests that “semen disgusts males only after it leaves the body, males will very likely come to view women as contaminated by this (to them) disgusting substance, while the male will view himself uncontaminated” (111). Reproduction is therefore both the site in which women are viewed as grotesque and the site where they are contaminated by both drugs and sperm. Through reproduction, women's physical borders are crossed. The impact of the grotesque and

its combination with violence is symbolised by the way in which Joichi rapes Akiko. As a result, she becomes pregnant. This pregnancy becomes the virtual result of the violence Joichi has inflicted upon Akiko, rendering violence physical and concrete in the face of reproduction. The violence is inflicted upon her by active mounting, and therefore contaminating both the outside of her body and the inside, her reproductive system.

Based on this I propose that male power is inflicted upon women with violence in the situation where the mounting man contaminates a woman with sperm, traditionally considered the “active” factor in a situation of impregnation. Sperm becomes the image of the cultural, patriarchal establishments that the authors present in their novels. Furthermore, sperm becomes symbolic of the argued fact that men are the true parents, because they, symbolically as well as literally, mount. Contaminating women in an endless process of disgust, violence and reproduction seems to be the main tool the men in the novels use to reaffirm their cultural status. By strengthening their status of being those who mount, and by using their physical strength, the male characters in the two novels are able to stay in control, causing and enhancing the disintegration of the female characters in the two novels. However, Ozeki and Dunn show the female characters rebelling in the face of this.

Reproductive Sexuality and Power

In the introductory remarks to this chapter I quoted Leigh Johnson: “women's bodily security, both inside and outside the home, affects how much control an individual woman has over her reproduction” (32). Jane confesses in *My Year of Meats* that she wants to film “a powerful affirmation of difference, of race and gender and the many faces of motherhood” (177). At the same time, Ozeki through Jane quotes the Japanese author Shōnagon: “When I make myself imagine what it is like to be one of those women who live at home, faithfully serving their husbands – women who have not a single exciting prospect in life yet who believe they are perfectly happy – I am filled with scorn” (17). Shōnagon expresses her concern that women who are just wives and mothers only believe that they are happy. Power over bodies must be asserted through power over reproduction and both authors present female characters who struggle with different aspects of motherhood. As a result, neither the reproductive body nor women's bodily security is secured. When women believe they are happy within the traditional power structures, they cannot gain full power over their own reproductive abilities. Based on this, it becomes clear that both novels discuss how and in what ways reproduction and the status as mother and wife, combined with knowledge of the structures that bind them,

become focal points for both bodily and cultural control. However, Johnson asserts in some ways that power can be gained over the female body, by women. In the following, I will discuss this possibility by investigating aspects of sexuality, consumerism and hunger.

In the pitch for *My American Wife!*, women are described as “attractive, appetizing” (8), eroticised and sexual, as a result of their preparation and consumption of meat. Meat and sex, or eating and sex stick together. The women in the show all make dishes that are voluptuous and abundant. Even Lara and Dyann, who do not cook meat, make a Pasta Primavera, symbolising spring and fertility. Preparing the food is filled with sexual connotations when the processes are captured on screen. Suzie Flowers is holding a large Coca-Cola bottle, frothing and bursting with soda, symbolising a large penis ejaculating over the meat, which is all wet and strangely sexual: “The woman shook the bottle, disgorging its contents in rhythmic spurts onto the red 'rumpu rossuto' [rump roast] ... her fingers look childlike as she squeezed [the bottle's] soft sides. The camera traveled down the foamy brown waterfall of Cola until it hit the meat, alive with shiny bubbles” (19). Similarly, giving birth is likened to the way the Coke bursts out of the bottle: “[Suzie's children] must have just poured out, Akiko thought, one after the other, in frothy bursts of fertility” (20). The connotations to ejaculation, sperm and female rumps are amazingly strong in these passages, conjoining sexuality and preparing food in an inescapable circle. Women themselves are compared with the food and bound together with the sexual connotations which are hidden beneath the process of filming the food preparation. Similarly, the female grotesques in *Geek Love* are also bound to the sexual in the way they are presented for an audience. Iphy and Elly state: “What they want to know, all of them, but never do unless they're drunk or simple is How do we fuck?” (207). Their appearance causes sexual connotations in the audience, in similar terms as the women who are depicted on *My American Wife!* are connected to sexual processes by making and eating meat. This entails that both women on a stage and women presented through television are seen as sexual in the process of being consumed by an audience. The mediated and consumed feminine body is therefore inescapably sexual. Akiko's reaction to the show about Suzie Flowers is symbolic of this, as she connects the “foamy brown waterfall” with “frothy bursts of fertility.” The mediated woman as sexual can therefore be argued to be the essence of marketing and consumption, where the symbolic consumption of the women on stage becomes the wish of actual consumption, either eating meat, or having sex with women.

Bordo presents Helena Mitchie's argument that female hunger is symbolic of female

sexuality (183). Mitchie's argument connects, I argue, the discussion concerning consumption, the sexual feminine stereotype and disorders. As the female characters in *My Year of Meats* are meant to market and consume meat, women's hunger is clearly a goal for the marketing process. The female audience is meant to become hungry, and the women who are depicted must present food in a way which causes this effect. Therefore, women consume and market their own hunger to feed their families and themselves. Since female hunger is linked with sexuality, as Mitchie argues, consuming the meat that is marketed through the TV-show becomes a symbolic consumption of the prostitution process of the female characters. The meat is symbolic of the female sexuality when it is conveyed as hunger. Since female hunger is crucial for the bulimia that Akiko suffers from, *not* being hungry is connected to *not* being sexual, as her eating disorder renders her barren and in many ways asexual. This asserts Mitchie's argument as valid, I propose. Consequently, this connection between female hunger and female sexuality can both limit and open up a female liberationist project.

Furthermore, I propose that audiences interpret images based on their hunger. Audience hunger is therefore crucial in this context: Hunger for meat for the women who look at *My American Wife!* and hunger for sex for the men who look at the twins doing their act. Audience hunger becomes the force that causes higher sales and more profit; because hunger is the factor which makes the audience want what is depicted on stage or TV. Hunger reaffirms the ways in which the female audience is meant to view and internalise the TV-show, as I described in chapter one of this thesis.

This prevailing focus on female performance, hunger and the preparation of food, concepts that are linked with the sexual nature of consumption, loads the implication of the focus on food in *My American Wife!* with other meanings. The image of the wives as “easy and done” (35), links them both to a rhetoric of consumption and to a vividly sexual discourse. The images of wives preparing food for their husbands bear connotations to women who prepare themselves for sex and reproduction. In other words, when they are making the food, the wives are symbolically preparing themselves for later consumption. As a result, meat becomes, as is Joichi's desire, the image of male sexuality and virility, as Chiu proposes (103). A possible conclusion must be drawn. Men are the ones who are typically associated with eating meat as Chiu argues, and meat and women are consumed similarly through the televised images. As a result, a female sexuality is in Ozeki's text something that is consumed by men, and for which the women only prepare for, and not actively engage in. Monica Chiu argues that Ozeki presents an image of the consumption of meat which “foreshadows a figurative consumption of women” (100), and I would argue that the consumption is not only

foreshadowed, but literally described. The process of preparing food for consumption and preparing oneself for a show are similar because the women prepare themselves for consumption by men, and other women. Women are sexualised through meat, in addition, the televised images of them as belonging in the kitchen reproduce the meat-women-sex connotation. When women are projected through media as belonging to the sphere of the kitchen, making food for their men and producing children, the image of women as sexualised and consumable objects reaffirms itself. In parallel, the housewives in Japan are compared with meat, they represent the “largest meat-eating *slice* of the population” (Ozeki 28 italics mine), and they can contribute to the consumption of “a lot of sirloin” (Ozeki 28). Women (and their children) are compared with, and their value is based on, how much meat they can consume, and how many children the women can produce through preparing themselves for sexual intercourse with men. In similar ways as Jane describes the wives she can use as “appetizing” in her pitch to the programme, the audience is also seen as consuming subjects, who, through their act of consumption, become consumable objects when they adopt and internalise the normative images they are presented with. Thus, Shameem Black's argument that both “women and meat become commodities on the global market whose bodies are shaped, deformed, and violated for commercial profit” (231) is underlined and validated both by Dunn and Ozeki through their narratives. These processes can be seen to undermine Johnson's argument that women can gain power. However, hunger and sexuality can prove to be important when it comes to the power of the female body.

Since the connotation between meat and women is largely bound together by men consuming meat for greater virility, I propose that it is not necessarily female hunger, but a masculine appetite which is the basis of the meat-women-sexuality connection. The notion of women as economic commodities is therefore based on a male hunger for meat. Women are likened to meat and female hunger represents female sexuality. As a result, the male hunger for meat symbolises a male hunger for sex. Male hunger is therefore a factor that must be altered, or applied as a tool for change, when considering the female characters' struggles.

Male hunger is central for Miss Lick's project in *Geek Love*. Miss Lick sees sexuality as a factor which does nothing else for women than oppress them, because being sexual renders a woman as either wife or whore. Miss Lick wants to save women who are in the danger of being “exploited by male hungers” (Dunn 162). When a woman is sexually attractive she is bound by the cultural expectations that will make her enter a subjugating marriage instead of leading her life on her own terms. Sexuality is therefore a powerful

negative force for women, a force that must be changed, or rather removed, because it negatively affects their relationship with men, according to Miss Lick. Therefore, she “wants to strip the women she treats of their sexuality” (Weese 355); she removes breasts, sexual organs and uses acid to destroy typical good looks. One of her patients has gone through “relatively minor surgery that closed her vagina and removed her clitoris” (Dunn 338). By doing this, Miss Lick attempts to remake pretty women into individual subjects, by taking away their possibility of becoming a wife or whore. Dunn, through Miss Lick, presents a satirised form of stigma: for women, “pretty” and “sexual” are the stigmatising factors which will lead to their oppression. Removing these factors and making women culturally ugly, what is normally considered stigmatising, remake women as individuals. Thus her project is to remove the reason for society's expectations towards them – their beauty and sexual appeal. The cultural expectations of pretty women are in many ways bound to factors related to male hunger and sexuality, I argue.

As sexuality is at the centre of this different concept of stigma, Dunn opens up, through Miss Lick, the possibility that stigma and contaminating substances, like sperm, meat and women who are not following the stereotype, can be used actively to enhance women's control over their own bodies. Nussbaum argues that “the specific cognitive content of disgust makes it of dubious reliability in social life” (74), making the social environment in which disgust is defined as the factor that needs to be discussed. The critique Dunn poses in her description of Miss Lick's actions lies therefore not in the idea of change itself, but in the fact that Miss Lick sees the female body as the problem, instead of being critical to the surrounding factors that define the female sexual body as automatically oppressed. Miss Lick's project is Dunn's satirised version of cosmetic surgery, which also defines the problem to lie in the “ugly” woman's body, not in the factors that define the woman in question as “ugly.” In addition, the “treatments” Miss Lick uses mirror methods that are used in real life in some cultures to control women's lives: acid attacks and genital mutilation. Her methods are consequently presented as negative forces for the female characters she operates on.

In this discussion, the two novels meet in Ozeki's description of Bunny Dunn. Having always followed the direction her breasts pointed her in, she is the ultimate example of a female who needs to be changed, according to Miss Lick. Based on this, both authors, I propose, front male sexuality as the major cause of women's oppression. It is not Bunny's sexuality which has made her go her in a given direction; rather, male hunger has directed her. However, Bunny is able to step out of the situation without undergoing physical changes. Her

situation asserts that women can take male hunger in their own hands, instead of applying Miss Lick's manipulating antidote, a process Dunn views with great scepticism. The better alternative is to take control over the stigmatising factors. As I argued above, sperm becomes the symbolic factor of female oppression through active, male contamination, and reproductive sexuality is the core of the stigmatisation of women and female oppression in the two novels. I propose that female hunger and their grotesque bodies can challenge the view on the disgusting and reformulate the stigmatising factors. Furthermore, the female body, when it is marked as grotesque, can also overturn the prevailing view of essential motherhood in the two novels. The grotesque body can reformulate the contaminating impact of sperm. By actively withdrawing from the sexual performance, suggested in the extreme way by Miss Lick, and in a more moderate way in Bunny Dunn, women are able to use male hunger on their own terms.

Katherine Dunn's presentation of the twins' sexual awakening in *Geek Love* becomes crucial in this argument. Their story will also be, I argue, the beginning of the ways in which women can overturn the image of themselves as consumed consumers, and by doing so, reinvent the female objects as individuals. Playing on curiosity and male hunger aided by the visualisation of themselves as sexual objects, Elly and Iphy begin selling sex to customers at a high price. In this way, the normal men are able to directly take part in the grotesque female, and entering (literally) the images that they fantasise about. At the same time, they can symbolically satisfy their hunger for meat, since the grotesque, sexual female is closely connected with animal flesh. Elly and Iphy realise that they are economic commodities, and that their bodies can be sold. Moreover, they decide to take control over their bodies as objects to be sold and use them as commodities for their own, personal gain, outside of male control. The twins take active control over their sexuality and men's hunger. In this way, they are able to control how they are defined as commodities. If they are in control, they gain from being commodities themselves; if they are controlled by a male, capitalist rhetoric, they are rather economic commodities for someone else's gain. The hitch in the twin's project is that they remain economic commodities, because their bodies are still sold. However, Dunn vaguely suggests a vision of how women can, through a rhetoric of reproduction, reconceptualise themselves, not in economic terms, but as individuals.

According to DiQuinzio, "the more successfully subjects abstract themselves from or transcend their material, social, and ideological contexts, the greater the truth of the knowledge they can acquire" (8). Through this consciousness, subjects can rise in terms of

individuality. DiQuinzio calls for, I propose, an individual removal from the cultural milieus that surround them, something all characters in the two novels attempt. According to Shameem Black, the language of childbirth in *My Year of Meats* “allows women to imagine new global futures relative to harmful global factors” (244). Combined with the ways in which the sisters in *Geek Love* attempt to reconceptualise themselves through sexuality and reproduction, this new imagination of a global future gains power and is an interesting point for discussion. The global future can provide an abstraction from the social and material contexts which DiQuinzio discusses. Reproduction and childbirth, combined with disgust, can prove to be the way out of the subjugating culture and to a new female reality.

As I discussed in chapter one, Akiko body refuses what it perceives as disgusting, and as a result, she is able to escape some of the stereotypes that Joichi attempts to impose on her. Akiko finally decides that she shall eat meat; she eats the forbidden lamb-chops that Joichi finds disgusting. I would argue that when Akiko eats the lamb-chops, she is engaging in what Susan Bordo describes as self-feeding, the opposite of feeding others. Symbolically she is caring for herself in a way that for instance Suzie Flowers did not. Self-feeding is the opposite of nurturing a family within the home (Bordo 171), and Akiko removes herself, through her eating (and enjoyment of it) from feeding Joichi and their married life, to nurturing herself as an individual. Her menstrual cycle begins, and Akiko thinks: “she wanted a child; she'd never wanted John; once she became pregnant, she wouldn't need him ever again.” (181). The self-feeding is therefore nurturing both herself and *her*, instead of *their*, future baby, making the baby she wants to conceive a symbol of her independence. Her body's reaction pinpoints that the contamination from sperm or drugs that women experience, or at least, that men impose and use as a stigmatising element, can be overturned. If factors of stigma can change, they can be taken into account for women's empowerment. In the same way, American wives Lara and Dyann nurture themselves first and foremost when they take into consideration the potential dangerous effects of meat. Stepping out of the meat-eating box, they see food as the source of self-nurturing. As a result, they are more independent than the other American Wives. Feeling female hunger and nurturing it with non-male food, in these cases Australian lamb and a vegetarian diet, removes the women from a “totally other-oriented economy” (Bordo 171) to a self-oriented economy, where taking care of their own bodies and lives and living accordingly is most important. Having babies during these conditions is presented as positive in Ozeki's text, largely due to the independent choices the women-become-mothers have made. They have managed through their diets to free themselves of the cultural normativity that the men

apply to the female characters. Sexuality and self-nurturing are combined, and Ozeki suggest a way in which Akiko can finally have a baby outside of Joichi's power and his cultural construct.

However, self-feeding also has a negative side. Because the lamb-chops are forbidden and disgusting in Joichi's view, Akiko is, at the same time as she is self-feeding herself, also contaminating herself according to Joichi's standards of disgust. Somewhat differently, the characters in Dunn's novel also attempt processes of self-contamination. Olympia impregnates herself with her brother's sperm, but because she attempts to control her own reproduction and rise in the hierarchy, she is seen as disgusting and is attacked by Arturo, the father-to-be. Olympia's sisters act similarly in attempting to empower themselves through contact with the disgusting: they have sex with "norms." However, they inevitably fail in their project to free themselves. Contaminating themselves leads to even closer control over their bodies and limits their freedom, when the male characters see the contamination, and as a result reaffirm their control over the girls. DiQuinzio argues that motherhood "encounters more directly the *risks* of difference" (68 *italics mine*), an argument which is valid in the context of the twins' experience. Overturning the notions that define disgust is extremely difficult for the female characters when it is attempted through the sexual and reproductive body. The reason is that motherhood, at the same time as it can be a way of opposing systems, also induces great risk towards the pregnant subject, because the experience is incorporated in the physical body. The twins' attempt to contaminate themselves by having sex with "norms" leads to their deaths, in the end caused by the baby they are forced to carry and give birth to. Violence is therefore, when combined with reproduction, a force which causes unwanted pregnancies through rape. Furthermore, unwanted pregnancies lead to violence in the most extreme grade. This is underlined in Dunn's description of Elly and Iphy who end up killing each other after Elly has murdered their child, Mumpo, the result of a rape ordered by Arturo. The quote from the beginning of this chapter: "Mumpo was eating the twins" (309), becomes the symbolic way of looking at how a child who is forced upon a female body renders her invisible, "mere body" as Susan Bordo argues, or even dead.

Likewise, Akiko's self-feeding poses a possible threat, because she is again able to conceive, and is again sexual. Joichi is furious with his wife, because she has not been able to provide him a son, therefore he brutally rapes her:

'So I guess it doesn't matter where I put it, does it?' he muttered, as he unzipped his pants. 'In the the front or in the back, it's all the same! It doesn't matter where, because you're a sterile, useless woman.' He lifted her by the hips and forced his penis into her anus. 'So I'll do it like you're a little boy. Do you like that' [...] 'You think I'm stupid? [...] You thought that I couldn't smell your bleeding?' (239).

Caused by Akiko's disorder and Joichi's hunger for sex and genetic offspring, which has not been satisfied, Joichi becomes an animal, driven by instinct, smelling fertility; the result of her self-feeding. However, what is interesting is that Akiko's disorder, and later her self-contamination, has reduced Joichi to the situation where he is perceived as stigmatised by his own standards. He has become an animal driven by instincts, closely related to the disgusting and the mortal, no longer a man of steel. Akiko's reaction to her pregnancy becomes symbolic of this change. Because Joichi is in the realm of the stigmatised, his power over her has faltered, and as a result, Akiko is not contaminated by his sperm. Instead, Joichi has aided her in the creation of a force which helps her escape from the violent marriage. Ozeki describes a woman who, through being violently raped, is paradoxically enabled, to take what the rapist has planted in her, and describe it as her own. In other words, as Akiko gains control over what was culturally seen as Joichi's, she removes herself from the realm of male power and into a female discussion of reproduction, by taking control over the contaminant. She is in charge of the moment when her body conceives the baby, and is therefore in control over her body and her pregnancy:

She looked down the length of her body, skeletal beneath the thin hospital sheet, and that's when she saw. Not saw, but conceived in her mind, a whip-tailed armada
zona pellucida, penetrated, now
a small round egg made lively, and
propelled downstream on ciliary currents through the darkness.
[...]
Holding her breath, Akiko watched it happen. And when her child-to-be was safely embedded, she let out her breath with a long sigh and fell sound asleep (Ozeki 305-6).

Slightly similarly, Jane gains strength when Joichi attempts to rape her, at the thought of an unwanted pregnancy: "The idea of being impregnated by this foul-breathing man gave me the jolt of strength I needed to jam my knee into his groin and my knuckles into his windpipe" (110). Furthermore, as a contrast to her sisters' destiny, Olympia takes control over her baby. After first trying to convince Arturo, the father, that she and her child are worthy of his respect, Olympia quits the idea and places her daughter outside of the male culture, into the nun's realm. Olympia does not manage the escape herself, but she has nevertheless taken control over what is traditionally seen as male property, the child. In the process, she took

active use of the ways in which Miranda was defined as less worthy than the cultural norm, employing the masculine concept of disgust on her own terms. The key to this new situation of empowerment is that both Akiko and Olympia take on the role as the active parent. Jane is actively able to hinder Joichi from mounting her, when she fights him off. Likewise, Arturo did never mount Olympia, he is physically unable to. As a result Arturo cannot claim the rights of the “true parent,” because Olympia has been in control of the process that caused the pregnancy. If Miranda had been valuable for the Binewski family she would have been kept; therefore, she, in her person combined with Olympia's act, symbolise a female power where people can be physically displaced to a different place, outside of the male culture, when actively using the masculine concept of disgust to define a new reality.

Struggling with reproduction makes the female characters struggle with their feeling of self, their place in the hierarchy, and having control over their lives. However, when they take on an active role when faced with issues concerning reproduction, the female characters enable themselves to take control over their bodies and destinies. This notion is strengthened by the destinies that the twins and Lily suffer. They did not manage or attempt to employ the contaminants actively, and as a result their bodies were severely affected due to their status as passive receivers. Having control over pregnancies and reproduction is therefore proven by the authors to be vital for the female characters in the novels.

Generally in her article, Black argues that Ozeki attempts to show ways in which women can remove maternity from the traditional patriarchal powers, and making it a concept of femininity and feminism through the development of different family structures: Family structures that do not include concepts of essential motherhood, the standard marriage and obligatory female heterosexuality. Furthermore, being an active participant in reproduction will remove the female body from violence and the “material, social, and ideological contexts” (DiQuinzio 8) that surround and limit them. In both novels, Black's redefinition is envisioned as a physical and literal move from the prevailing contexts, symbolised by Akiko who travels from Japan to America and Olympia who lives with her daughter, although incognito, outside the family structures in which she has grown up.

I propose that there is one main reason that the male characters in the novels reaffirm their control over reproduction and the cultures that surround reproduction and child-bearing. Losing this control will lead to a loss in financial power, in addition to a loss of the position as the head of the family. Both Al and Joichi rely on this to feel complete and powerful as individuals, I argue. Olympia says that Al “was fuzzy behind the eyes because he was no longer the actual King Cob of all the Corn” (145). I propose that in the two novels, the male

characters' violent reactions to the women that attempt to take control over their sexuality, are caused by the knowledge that reproduction is central to feminine identity and freedom. I argue that the male characters are aware of the fact that if they lose control over reproduction, a new system based on matriarchy may evolve as an extreme reaction to the patriarchal rules that define the cultural systems in the two novels: The new and different family structures that Black calls for in her article. In the introduction to this article, I quoted Nussbaum who states that in European countries, birth rates fall because women want to work instead of being home with children. The situations in the novels underline this, as the male characters urge “their” women to have more children to reaffirm *their* cultures and ways of life.

The question both novels poses, I argue, is how the female characters can reformulate their relationship with their reproductive bodies when faced with the possible power they can provide. Black suggests that by establishing transcultural alliances (229), women will be able to start a new discussion concerning motherhood and reproduction. Through a feminist discussion of these issues, the female characters can enable themselves to open up the normative cultures and discourses that define them as housewives and mothers, and as a result, gain power over their own lives. Feminist literature becomes crucial in this project, as the authors underline, both in their novels in general and in the ways in which the female characters discuss the issues concerning motherhood. If motherhood is an imaginative site where “transcultural feminist communities begin to cohere” (Black 233), gaining control over motherhood, perhaps not physically in the first place, but mentally, will enable women to take on more control, and in the future be able to have full power over their own reproductive capacity. Black's notion of placing motherhood into the imaginative sphere opens up the discussion to a realm where also those women who either choose not to or cannot have children are included. Motherhood in the imaginative sphere can be seen as a symbol of total feminine control over female reproduction, where neither the concept of motherhood nor women are boxed in by stereotypical limits. Following from the earlier catch-22 argument where women are eternally trapped within their own bodies and reproductive capacities, it can be argued that removing reproduction to a discussion on a philosophical and imaginative level may be the key to opening up this vicious circle of power and control. Both novels underline this in their discussions of the female struggle with physical aspects of reproduction.

Iris Young suggests that “pregnancy makes uniquely available (although it does not guarantee) a very different experience of the relationship between the mind and the body, inner and outer, self and other than that presumed by Descartes, Hobbes” (quoted in Bordo 96). The relationship between the mind and the body is changed when women are struggling

with reproduction and pregnancies. Jane is baffled and shocked when she understands she is pregnant, and suffers when she has a miscarriage. Both Akiko and Olympia feel special when they are pregnant; they include the mind in the physical experience of pregnancy. Olympia felt miraculous and was “beside [her]self with glory” (299), and Jane admits that being pregnant “quickened [her] emotions” (189). Both authors argue, I propose, that this different and new relationship between the mind and the body can be the tool for a feminine empowerment of reproductive bodies. Realising that they, as women, can never be in full control, and at the same time coming to terms with the different aspects of reproduction, gives the female characters power. A new philosophy may emerge in this recognition, leading to a new outlook on women as other in a positive way, through the defining element that pregnancies and motherhood can provide in the relationship between mind and body. Even women who cannot or do not want to become pregnant can partake in this mind-body relationship, as they nonetheless will make an active choice and consider the effects of a pregnancy upon their physical body.

Importantly, Ozeki provides other ways of having children in her text, for instance by adoption, an active choice, a choice that gives both Jane and Grace, the woman who adopts Korean children, the power and freedom to decide the use of their own bodies. In the same ways as the twins in *Geek Love* engaged in utilising male sexual curiosity to establish some sort of power, Akiko and Jane find their own curiosity and creative abilities to be the source of a possible new type of power. When Jane accepts that she cannot become pregnant, and Akiko decides to run away, they both remove their bodies from male control and reconceptualise them as their own individual bodies, inscribed by reproduction in ways they decide for themselves. In doing so, both the female characters leave the realm of disorders and inscribe their bodies with independence instead of dependence. As a fear of losing control is all-important for the male characters in the two novels, Dunn and Ozeki vividly put this fear up for scrutiny as they portray how Al and Joichi struggle to stay in control over “their” women's bodies, at the same time as the women struggle, and to some extent manages, to develop their own cultural discussion based on an acceptance of their reproductive bodies. The definitions of truth, stereotypes and body control in cultural environments are bound by a control over female reproductive bodies, and a control over the ways in which the reproductive abilities are used and executed within the different cultural milieus. At the same time, reproduction also becomes the force through which these cultural milieus and the stereotypes that define them can change and alter, in the meeting between physicality and ideas.

Chapter 3

A Feminine Discourse – A Rhetorical Reconceptualisation

Arty always talked to the people. It was a central charm of his act that, though he looked and acted alien, part animal, part myth, he would prop his chin up on the lip of the tank to talk 'just like folks.' Only it wasn't just quite like folks (Dunn 49).

I think it's about time they started consulting us, we have a voice, we need to come out with our voices (anonymous, quoted by Kay M. Tisdall, in Riddell Warren 19).

In what ways can we, from the vantage point of disability, rewrite the terrain occupied by race, class, gender, and queer theory within the context of transnational capitalism? (Nirmala Erevelles 93).

Introductory Remarks

Kay M. Tisdall's and Nirmala Erevelles' quotes above call for a rhetorical universe where every individual is heard, even if they are disabled, female, from a minority, or is given any other definition that leads the majority population to mark them with the debatable label "different." At the same time, Katherine Weese argues that "female grotesques [...] must find modes of self-expression outside the literal carnival setting, a space where they are oppressed by the carnival's entirely conventional patriarchal settings" (349). I propose that she calls for a setting where women are not defined based on their physical bodies, but given validity as human being based on their individual personalities in power of being themselves, instead of attempting to become a stereotype. Female empowerment in a rhetorical culture becomes a setting where women are taken into consideration regardless of their "difference."

In Arturo's quote above, from *Geek Love*, Dunn underlines the importance of language in the development of a personality. Because Arty talks just like folks, the audience looks beyond his "freakish" body and listens instead to what he has to say. Arturo's rhetorical abilities are therefore very important for his status in the Binewski show. Moreover, when considering the three quotes together, rhetorical tools are highlighted as crucial for minor groups. Arty has power over his voice, he is able to make others listen to him, and hence, he gains power, despite his physical appearance. This power is underlined by both Tisdall and Erevelles as all-important for personal development. Tisdall calls for a personal individual voice, and Erevelles voices the need for a structural change in the cultural terrain, a terrain she argues must be written anew. Rhetorical tools are crucial in this context, I argue, either in the

form of the written word or the spoken voice.

Lynne Pearce states that “my own feminism was born out of *an act of writing*; out of a singular brand of feminist rhetoric whose trademark is still widely associated with the movement and which, in certain contexts, continues to inspire” (1), linking writing and rhetorical expressions to the constitution of an individual. Rhetorical tools are therefore powerful in the development of individual meaning, and in her comment, Pearce pinpoints this power of rhetorics. Further, she underlines that expressions and images can be interpreted and perceived differently, depending on the receiver of the message: “Rhetoric [...] has also enabled, and constrained, the very substance of my thinking” (2). Furthermore, because there is “plenty of evidence that [...] the written text has long offered women the freedom of all manner of rhetorical experiment and assertion” (Pearce 5), texts, either spoken or written, are important in this rhetorical reconceptualisation in the two novels. Applying Pearce's argument to a reading of the two novels creates the notion that women must establish their own rhetorical tools; they cannot only trust those of men. The question is how the female characters and women in general, can develop and utilise rhetorical tools for their own reconceptualisation.

According to Lara Descartes and Conrad P. Kottak, “the mass media and the representations they offer (whether based in fiction, myth or 'real life'), powerfully shape the ways in which people organize themselves and their expectations” (2). In the two previous chapters I have discussed how the female characters find themselves to some degree trapped in cultures that are mediated and defined by men. Within these systems, the women actively take part in enhancing the stories and the mediated images that the men in the novels offer for interpretation. As a result, the female characters reaffirm the cultural messages, by being part of the system as consumers and consumed objects. In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which media images can be the source for a reconceptualisation of stories and images, and how women, by taking control over the cultural discourse in which they find themselves, can redefine how they function as individuals and as a group within societies and cultures. Power over media and the images that they broadcast are therefore vital in redefining individual expression, as these images shape the ways in which individual expressions of self come to life. I propose that the female characters in both novels attempt to redefine their own voices and their own stories. These voices and stories will be part of redefining a cultural environment that gives room for difference.

Nirmala Erevelles argues that it is “essential to (re)theorize the disabled subject in such a way that it would enable us to explain where disabled people are located within the prevailing social relations of production” (94). The meaning of this in the context of the two novels is that not only a feminine identity, but a disabled identity must be theorised and reformulated. As a result of such a reformulation, the social relations between the “able-bodied” and the “disabled” must be reproduced. The reformulation does not only concern individual bodies, but rather the social relationships between individuals. Rhetorical tools are important in this context, because acceptance of the different must be a social, not just an individual project. The social relationships between the disabled and the able-bodied also affects the social relations between genders, I argue.

Susan Bordo also calls for a discussion and a rhetoric which, instead of discussing a concept of women's choice concerning reproduction, will look to a broader context: “Both pro-choice and pro-life arguments are locked into rhetorics and strategies that fail to situate the struggle within the broader context of reproductive control” (71). Combined with Erevelles argument above, it seems here that Susan Bordo looks to the broader context of the body in general. The “broader context” that Bordo wants to open a discussion around is in fact the same structure as the “prevailing social relations” Erevelles points to. I propose that this broader context is the link between concepts of reproductive choice, motherhood and disabled bodies. Reproductive choice and disability are in many ways decided by larger social structures, for instance religion, jurisdiction, social rules of conduct and so forth. In both *Geek Love* and *My Year of Meats*, reproduction, reproductive control and the many faces of motherhood are connected to notions of disability and disorder which again are closely linked to the body. In both novels, I argue, reproduction is in many ways central to how and why women are named as disabled. Lara Descartes and Conrad P. Kottak propose that women “bear not only the moral burden of mothering, they also have a possessive interest in it, for they are judged by the product of their labor – their children” (16), providing the link between Bordo's and Erevelles' arguments and the two novels in question. If disability is caused by being unable to partake in capitalist production, motherhood is part of this structure at the moment children are seen as a product. Further, Nirmala Erevelles looks to different scholars who have “theorized the body as the local site where the micro politics of power are disrupted,” so that the body can be emancipated from the normative (92). I propose that both Dunn and Ozeki do exactly this; they look to specific bodies and their reactions to stereotypes and cultural politics. On this basis, they reveal the larger structures that decide how and if

women can determine their own reproduction, and how and why some people are marked as disabled.

Dunn and Ozeki attempt in their novels to give their female characters voices which will (re)instate them as independent individuals, and at the same time reformulate the social and cultural contexts that surround them. Furthermore, the authors assert how a feminine type of expression is different from masculine artistic expression and rhetorical tools. I will investigate if one of the clues for the establishment of a feminine rhetoric lies in being different from the norms that are defined by masculine art, and that the forces of change also are embedded in this difference. Because disorders and motherhood have been suggested to be powerful in my earlier discussion, I propose that these forces can unite in a rhetorical development and in a feminine voice. I will also argue that motherhood becomes one of the factors that make the feminine rhetoric different from the masculine. Through feminine rhetorics, an individual can reformulate the difference that marks her as deviant to a difference that makes her powerful, I propose. By realising and seeing the “prevailing social relations of production,” that Erevelles discusses, the female subject will be able to see that the definition of her as disabled is caused by structures outside of herself, not factors that are inherent in her body.

As Jane and Joichi struggle over the power to decide what is “American” and “female,” and make these concepts the centre of the battle for the definition of norms (Chiu 100), the fluidity and relative value of categories like these are brought into the light. Defining the concepts “American” and “female” is close to impossible, as a person's definition of them will be coloured by her or his preconceptions and background, as I discussed in chapter one of this thesis. In this chapter, I will propose that the difference between fluid definitions and individual standards will be evident in the meeting point between the masculine and the feminine rhetoric. Therefore, since disability and gender are unstable concepts, it is important to redefine not only the concepts of identity, but the basis for the construction of identity itself, in this case gender and disability. Truth is not only impossible to define. Moreover, the subjectivity I discussed as being the basis for certain concepts of truth is equally fluid. What the two authors may seem to discuss in their novels can therefore be whether gender and disability are truly founding factors for an identity, and if these should be counted as factors for an individual subjectivity at all. By presenting different ways of defining nations, human value and identities, I propose that the two novels call for a cultural milieu in which women and mothers should not need to define themselves on the basis of their gender or their

reproductive abilities. Individuality should not need to be based on fluid definitions and social constructs, and a feminine voice will look to and shed light on these issues.

Jane Maree Maher argues that “the changes in space, place and time wrought by globalization alter, complicate and intensify pressures in the already complex field of reproduction and mothering” (18). The complex field of mothering can be the focus point for opening up a discussion concerning difference and minority groups in general. In the prevailing discourse I discussed in chapter two, women are still in many ways defined based on their status as mothers or not mothers. The difference of women who choose to not become mothers will no longer be “different” in a rhetoric that defines individual value based on a subjective individuality, instead of the fulfilment of gender based and relative stereotypes. Dunn's fictional world is therefore a kick to Ozeki's world, where women do exactly this; define themselves and others on the basis of how, and if, they are mothers and wives. As I argued earlier, Jane's vision of women is limiting, due to her belief that all women are mothers, a notion which is based on a belief in essential motherhood. In her focus on women as mothers, and in her own struggle to have a child, Jane is blind to the fact that some women do not have children. In Dunn's novel, Miss Lick becomes the central character for critiquing this. Although her project to help women is critiqued by Dunn, her work is still pointing towards a culture where women are valued because of what they *do*, not on the basis of what they *are*. As a contrast, the female characters in Ozeki's novel are always discussing how they can become mothers, and what they are for their children. Although this is an important part of life for many women, both Dunn and Ozeki are critical towards this one-sided discussion. Ozeki even voices a critique on the focus on being mother through the character Grace, the only person who speaks up against biological motherhood: “‘Thinkin' about all the billions of people on the earth multiplying, having more and more babies – I swear it used to keep me awake at night. It still does. It's the single most underdiscussed issue in the world’” (69). I will not discuss overpopulation in this thesis, but based on Grace's comment, I argue that both authors look to ways of opening up this discussion concerning a definition of female identity, both in a larger, world-wide context, and locally in the systems where women are defined on the basis of notions of motherhood connected to stigma and disability. It is in the context of the body as marked when faced with motherhood, disorders and disability that I will discuss a feminine rhetorical reconceptualisation.

Dabbling in the Male Tongue

Authors Hildy Miller and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles state: “if there *is* a women's rhetoric, it is as elusive, contradictory, and fragmentary as the footprints of Ariadne” (13). In other words, women speak, but in a hidden manner, in rhetorical tools that are neither seen nor heard. Drawing lines to the first chapter where I discussed how women reaffirmed male cultural stereotypes in their own bodies, I will here propose that this reaffirmation goes deeper when voice and expressions are considered as part of the process. In many ways, the female characters in the two texts use a male language, bound by the male cultural discourse, to express themselves. In the following I will discuss the hidden female voice in the two novels' cultural systems, a female voice which is buried under and controlled by male voice and male violence.

Katherine Dunn lets her character Al Binewski express a male view on the female voice in a comment about Olympia's voice: “I gave [your voice] to you from the love of my guts for your scrawny and unmarketable carcass, so be kind enough to use it properly!” (Dunn 45). Al Binewski's comment touches upon several important aspects concerning how women shall use “their” voice, and to what purpose this voice shall serve. The quote asserts that Olympia is bound by perhaps the most severe combination of patriarchal control over female voice. Firstly, her voice is not really hers. Secondly, she is forced to use this other voice which is given to her, and thirdly, she is meant to use it properly, that is serving the cause that Al Binewski has set out for her and his carnival. At the same time, Elly and Iphy “had begun writing music and they did a lot of pouting because Papa wouldn't let them play their own songs in their act. 'Classics. That's what people want. Stick to classics,' Papa would say” (89). The twins are not allowed to create their own voice, but must stick to what Al defines as the classics songs which assert his view on the carnival. As a result, the twins also use their voice to enhance a male type of expression, and Al becomes symbolic of the utmost version of male control over female voice, burying his daughters' subjectivity under his masculine form of expression.

Ozeki presents a similar structure in the first statement Jane makes about *My American Wife!*. Jane is marked by the cultural language that the male capitalist powers use to portray women. She writes the pitch for the show, describing the “Meat Made Manifest,” and the text is “a more or less faithful translation of the Japanese text that [Kato] had dictated to [Jane] over the phone” (8). Jane adds: “well, maybe not so faithful, maybe a little excessive,

in fact. But I liked it. It would do” (8). In addition to copying the words the male producer dictates, Jane enhances them, makes them more excessive than Kato's words. Jane is not just copying the masculine tongue; in fact, she reaffirms it and makes it more powerful. Furthermore, Jane confesses to hunt American wives in attempts to capture and use them: “Fingers twitching on the pole of a large net, I would prowling the freezer sections of food chains across the country, eyeing the unsuspecting housewives of America as they poked their fingers into plastic-wrapped flank steaks” (10). Jane dabbles in the masculine tongue, using her own voice, but fronting male views, in her hunt for exploitable American housewives.

However, in the two novels, a battle against a masculine rhetoric is found. Arturo, like his father, practices “masculine art”: this artistry which [...] consists of manipulating others' bodies” (Weese 352). *Geek Love* establishes a battle between this masculine art of manipulation, and those who are (attempted) manipulated by that same art. The battle takes place between the children of the family (and the women in particular) and Al and Arturo's art which employs drugs and psychological terror to enhance the message. In similar terms, the TV-show that Joichi and Beef-Ex control is part of a male discourse which also attempts to manipulate female bodies through cultural expectations. The battle is between the capitalist manipulative powers that control the TV-show and the women who are affected by the mediated images. The female characters in both novels attempt to stand up against male art and the masculine rhetorical tools which have as an expressed goal to change the female body and the ways in which women shall act and behave culturally. What stands as the barrier for the women in this battle is that the feminine rhetoric is hidden, as Miller and Bridwell-Bowles propose. This lack of voice comes to show on the disordered female body, as I discussed in the previous chapters. Many of the female characters attempt to adopt the male rhetoric as their own as part of the struggle against it, but are destined to fail in the process. As I argued earlier, using masculine rhetorical tools as a way of reconceptualising feminine identity only leads to a reaffirmation of the male norms and a further development into the masculine stereotype. The important theme in both novels: how women can reformulate their realities and identities, is therefore enhanced in this contrast. The female characters try to embark on this reformulation, but do not, and cannot fully succeed when they only are adopting the male tongue.

Jane realises clearly that her engagement in the masculine art when creating the show and thus creating stereotypes of women is the same thing as taking advantage of the female objects she films, however she is not active in changing how she is part of this reaffirmation:

You're doing a wife or two a week. While you are shooting them, they are your entire world and you live in the warm, beating heart of their domestic narratives, but as soon as you drive away from the house, away from the family all fond and waving, then it is over. Their lives are sealed in your box of tapes, locked away in the van, and you send these off with the director to edit back in Tokyo, and that's it. Easy. Done (35-6).

What Jane does not realise, is that the women who watch the show in Japan are in a process of losing their voices, because Jane is speaking in a male tongue. She sees the battle, but closes her eyes for the impact of it. "The modern Japanese housewife, living in a hermetic existence, increasingly cut off from contact with the world, is literally losing her voice" (87-8). Ozeki pinpoints here that using a male rhetoric will not lead to a better communication between women worldwide as is Jane's aspiration. Rather, using a male language and discourse when portraying women will lead to a further alienation and differentiation of women from each other, leading them to a situation where women stand alone in a process of being "othered" by the masculine discourse. Further, the male stereotypical images, when communicated by a woman, will lead to an even greater gap between what are actually women's individual experiences of their daily lives and what is expected of them by male, capitalist forces.

Ozeki underlines that the exploitation of women as cultural commodities is hurting them, when she presents Jane's double role and her lack of scrutiny. Jane's role is also symbolic of Beef-Ex's lack of care for the human beings they take advantage of to sell their meat: "the worn fabric of her life tore like a tissue under the harsh exposure of my camera; I watched it happen, took aim, exposed her, then shot her in the heart" (176-7), Jane says. Human beings are just cultural negotiators that are used to sell products. They are not regarded as individuals with feelings and lives that matter. Cindy Moore argues that "because voice is a patriarchal metaphor", "it brings with it a certain amount of cultural clout, a certain degree of power – just as words like *author* and *owner* bring" (Moore in Miller and Bridwell-Bowles 196). Further she states that "the women who have trouble expressing themselves in our classes are the same women who write about physical restrictions or abuse, rape, anorexia, and suicide" (200). Lacking a voice is therefore linked with bodily abuse and in some instances bodily annihilation, symbolised by Jane's process of "shooting" women, described in the quote above. Voice is therefore strongly connected to the context of disorder and stereotypes that I presented in chapter one. Being disordered, women are unable to use their voice, which leads to further structural subjugation, and Jane enhances this process, as Ozeki underlines in the quote from *My Year of Meats* above. In other words, the result of

dabbling in the male tongue is a further stigmatisation of women who do not live up to the standard, and a further reaffirmation of the masculine stereotypical images of gender and individuality.

In similar terms as Jane attempts, but fails, to recreate an image of women by using a patriarchal rhetoric, does Miss Lick, in Dunn's novel, attempt to use a specifically masculine art. She means to manipulate bodies to free women from harmful stereotypes. Her attempt to do so is, I propose, linked with the concept of lacking a voice. Miss Lick has no voice, and uses the words of her father: "her tongue is modeled on his" (337). Miss Lick is the image of Pearce's theory come alive: "women will have wanted to utilize as wide a range of rhetorical strategies as possible and, perhaps, especially those who have proven effective in the male discourse" (Pearce 5). Miss Lick's attack on the masculine image of the female body is therefore set into life by using the tactic she herself has felt on her own body as a woman unable to become the sexual stereotype. Miss Lick's efforts ultimately fail, however, because she, instead of looking to find a new feminine voice, uses the masculine art of manipulation in her attempt to change women's lives. The masculine art is the only art she knows. In addition, I propose, Miss Lick attempts to change the women into versions of herself, because she is "an example of what can be accomplished by one unencumbered by natural beauty" (162). Miss Lick becomes the standard, a new norm that the women she treats should be like. Her standard does not give room for individuality.

When Olympia states that "'Truth' was Elly's favorite set of brass knuckles, but she didn't necessarily know the whole elephant. If what she said about Arty was 'true,' it still wasn't the whole truth" (114), Dunn points to aspects of women's struggle from within the male discourse. Not being able to define your personal truth because a defined truth is already defined for you is one of the major reasons for female oppression, as symbolised by Miss Lick's project above. Neither Miss Lick nor Elly can use their own voice. Elly's insistence on truth becomes the image of how women attempt to redefine the male truth as their own. Not having the voice and rhetorical tools to define your own individual truth is part of the subjugating system. The systematic subjugation includes actively hiding the female voice under male rhetorics. Having no voice and no possibilities for artistic expression, naming yourself as you truly are as an individual, or taking part in the world of words is essentially impossible. Defining standard truths is part of the male discourse. Because she attempts to use truth as a weapon, Elly also dabbles in the male tongue, and is therefore unable to step out of the male reality, no matter how hard she tries.

Outside the carnival setting, Olympia also attempts to take control over her voice, the voice which was given to her by her father. She becomes Hoppalong McGurk, no longer Olympia Binewski, and actually manages to act in the economic world:

I can never be inconspicuous in person. A hunchback is not agile enough for efficient skulking. But my voice can take me anywhere. I can be a manicured silk receptionist, a bureaucrat of impenetrable authority, or an old college chum called Beth. I can be a pollster doing a survey of management techniques or a reporter for the daily paper doing a feature on how employees view their bosses. Anonymous, or course – no real names used and all businesses disguised (150).

Olympia engages in extreme self-creation through her voice, her voice can make her into anything she wants, and Dunn asserts in this the immense power that can lie in rhetorical expressions and words. However, there is one major hitch in Olympia's voice: it is her father's, she has not really created it herself. Her voice is therefore only a tool to take on different types of personas, able to manipulate the world, but not fully participate in it, as becomes evident from the quote above. As a result, Olympia still dabbles in the male tongue.

Nevertheless, Ozeki points to a quite different aspect of using a male discourse in portraying Jane's interest in the author Shōnagon. She states that “women diarists, who were writing prose, ... were supposed to use a simplified alphabet, which was soft and feminine. But Shōnagon overstepped her bounds. From time to time, she wrote in Chinese characters. She dabbled in the male tongue” (14-5). Just like Jane, Shōnagon uses male language to express herself; they are both women who attempt to break the limits that the culture in which they live imposes upon them. Importantly, Shōnagon's way of dabbling in the male tongue includes a change in the ways in which the language is used. By secretly writing in the male language, Shōnagon is able to express herself in a more powerful way than if she had used the feminine alphabet. She has taken a masculine rhetorical tool and adopted it has her own, and therefore she is, I propose, able to reformulate the use of the language itself. Ozeki here pinpoints ways in which women, by taking on masculine rhetorical expressions as their own, are able to reformulate male art and make it more feminine. As a result, what Ozeki also points to in her novel is that there are different ways to dabble “in the male tongue” (15). Jane looks to Shōnagon as her great inspiration: stating that “she inspired me to become a documentarian, to speak men's Japanese” (15) and Akiko also reads her diaries and writings. Consequently, the Japanese woman writer functions as a strong link between the women,

because she writes in the male alphabet; the powerful male tongue. In the following, I will discuss how the two authors in question shed light on these issues in the description of their female characters and the ways these different characters act.

Earlier, I argued that Jane and Miss Lick fail in their liberating projects largely because they attempt to use masculine art as their main tool. Olympia also attempts to take control over her own body by using masculine art: she tries to manipulate her physical body through the pregnancy in the hope that this will lead to greater value in the hierarchy. Furthermore, in her life outside the carnival, Olympia uses her voice to become something else than she is; but she remains invisible, only heard. As Pearce argues that rhetoric both enables and constrains thinking, Olympia's pregnancy can be seen as the crucible where the enabling and the disabling factors meet. Olympia's form of dabbling in the male tongue has a result; Miranda, who is given a special role in this context in *Geek Love*. She is the direct result of a woman dabbling in the male tongue; she is the product of the crucible. That is, Miranda is born as a result of a woman attempting to take control over her own reproductive destiny in a cultural society that to a great extent shuns this control. Consequently, Miranda can be seen as the symbolic result of one woman's fight to elevate her status in a society which placed and kept her in an eternally low position. Miranda is a direct result of male art, but importantly, the *idea* for the creative process was spawned by a woman. In the following I will discuss how Miranda, as a result of the combined efforts of male creation and an attempt to use a female voice, can be seen to be the source of a feminine type of expression that will open up a discussion concerning cultural stereotypes and gender images. I will also discuss Jane's role in this context, because she at first uses the male tongue, but later develops it into a feminine form of expression. The importance of masculine art and male rhetorical expressions, in both Dunn's and Ozeki's novel, is therefore that this type of discourse can function as a starting point. When women attempt to dabble in the male tongue, they can perhaps manage to develop their own form of expression. In the following I will discuss Miranda's and Jane's roles in this project and point to aspects of the two novels that can look to a specific female rhetoric as a founding element in women's liberation.

A Feminine Rhetoric – Artistic Expressions

Patricia P. Chu argues that “the author's capacity to write and publish a narrative of subject formation – that is, to position himself or herself in relation to the 'language' of his or her culture's narrative conventions – determines his or her survival as an 'author,' a subject known through words” (10-11). Chu also argues that to belong in a cultural, textual discourse, “a city

of words” (3), women must call themselves the names they truly are. I propose that Chu describes the feminine rhetoric that the female characters in the two novels attempt to establish. This feminine discourse is in opposition to the masculine manipulative rhetoric, and provides women with the power to name themselves as the individuals they truly are. But to establish this opposition, the female characters must manage to create this rhetoric, and it must provide a clear opposition to the masculine manipulative art that controls the characters in the two novels. Being the physical and literal result of feminine idea and masculine art, Miranda becomes a key character in this project of defining a feminine voice. Importantly, the first establishment of this different type of expression is presented by Dunn in a discussion between Olympia and Miranda when Olympia sits as a model for drawing. Miranda goes to an art school to become a medical illustrator. Olympia asks: “What made you decide to be an artist?... 'No, no. A medical illustrator...photographs can be confusing. A drawing can be more specific and informative. It gets pretty red in there. Pretty hot and thick” (30-1). Miranda is clear on the fact that she does not attempt to portray or describe an artistic truth. Instead she focuses on, and realises the importance of, describing human bodies subjectively, and with care and love. Instead of providing a photograph posing as objectivity, Miranda realises that all creative expressions bear in them an independent subjectivity, be it the angle the photographer chooses, or the type of pencil the illustrator uses. Therefore, she places herself on the outside of what is seen as masculine art, which has its main focus to manipulate and define. Depicting something accurately, with care, not judgement, and thus also attempting to be as accurate as possible, to not make reality appear less “ugly” than it possibly is, entails a respect for the people she draws.

Masculine art becomes in this way part of the question concerning a fluid truth which I discussed in chapter one and Miranda sets out to do the opposite: not depicting a truth which always will be marked by the artist. Rather she attempts to describe, being open about her influence on the description as a person who sees and interprets. Miranda's drawings are non-judgemental and do not attempt to establish a concept of truth. Instead, the drawings attempt to describe a person's individuality, which is subjectively true for the person who is being drawn. Weese therefore argues that “Miranda shows how her work is lovingly rendered and made deeper than the surface reality a photo or mirror would reflect. Her drawings are multilayered alternatives to the strict either-or thinking that characterizes Lick's and Arty's modes of artistry” (358). The multiple layers of her drawings are the inclusive and descriptive layers of the many faces of a human being.

The drawings can also be seen as alternatives to the categories of women and ethnicity

that Beef-Ex has established in their search to market meat in Japan. Miranda's suggestion of a feminine, descriptive art can prove to be the counterpoint to the masculine, manipulative art. Her type of expression can provide the “rhetorics, discursive formulations, poetics” (43) that David Palumbo-Liu proposes that minor groups need to establish to be seen and fully included in society, to be acted “sanely and humanely” towards (43). For a character like Olympia, this type of rhetorical expression is scary, because she has never been able to see herself descriptively. Instead, she has always regarded herself in contrast with the stereotypes that she did not fulfil. Masculine art in *Geek Love* is the game of seeing what is negative and how this can be improved (or not), whereas the feminine rhetoric is seeing value in what is already present:

She has mounted [the drawings] on cardboard and she stores them in a huge plastic bonder. 'I want you to look at them.' 'I can't.' 'All this time you've never looked.' 'Just not at the ones of me. I don't want to see myself.' 'You look in mirrors. I'm better than any goddamned mirror.' 'It's not your work. I like your other drawings. This just scares me.' 'I take it personally. This is my best work. The best I've ever done. I don't see you as ugly. I see you as unique and wonderful' (341).

I argue that Miranda's comment in this conversation underlines and asserts that feminine art is more inclusive and accepting than male art. Where male art attempts to manipulate and set standards, female art is accepting and describing. Having to look at the subjective depiction of herself, Olympia is confronted with being seen as a human being, an individual, by a person who sees beyond her disability. This becomes the intimidating part for Olympia, and she misunderstands the intentions behind the drawings: “She is not interested in my identity... I am merely a utensil, a temporary topic for the eternal discussion between her long eye and her deliberate hand” (30), she states. Olympia's reaction is based on the fact that she is used to being seen merely on the basis of her looks and outer appearance. Having lived under the influence of male art all her life, she believes that her physicality is her identity, when it has rather been her father's description of her, masked as individuality. Therefore, when Olympia realises that Miranda attempts to go beneath the surface, she feels exploited because being looked at on the basis of personality and independent human value is a new experience for her. Therefore, she does not

understand the drawings or why they move me. I want to cry loud and wet with the pain of love. The drawings are as mysterious to me as the school report cards that the Reverend Mother mailed dutifully every few months. No Bineswki ever made pictures. I never had a report card. But I saved Miranda's, stacked and wrapped with a rubber band in the biggest of the old trunks (25).

As the Binewskis never tried to see beyond pure bodily matters, they did not need to portray human being through artistic expressions. But, because of the accident that killed almost the entire family, Olympia is in some ways “freed from Arty's controlling influence, [she] can tell her tale, commenting on and critiquing the cultural values that have wrought such devastation” (Warren 327). Therefore, Olympia is moved by the drawings. Olympia has unconsciously taken part in a feminine discourse by saving the report cards. She has made the trunk into her private discourse, as a contrast to the Binewski world. Warren's comment is still only valid to some extent, as Olympia does not cope too well with being seen descriptively. This is underlined by the struggle Olympia engages in to keep Miranda's tail intact, the tail which Miss Lick wants to remove. Olympia is still very much coloured by the male artistry, which has formed and shaped her. Based on this, I propose that the feminine rhetoric presupposes a system where the women who are able to talk in a feminine tongue are outside of the influence of men.

Rhetorical Tools – Power over Female Bodies

According to Catherine Wynne, feminine power must rest in the body (152), and this argument is somewhat straightforward when considering Miranda's situation. Dunn portrays her as largely being in control over her own body and how she uses it, and therefore I propose, she is also able to develop a feminine rhetoric. By not accepting manipulation to her body, she remains in power over herself, largely due to the way she defines herself through her artistry. I propose that Miranda is able to develop her feminine rhetoric of drawing because she was raised in an environment that was, to lesser extent than the Binewski family, controlled by manipulative art. As a result, Miranda has grown into an independent woman with self esteem, able to make a living based on her own terms and wishes, despite her tail and her good looks, both of which would have caused severe problems either in the Binewski world (due to her “normality”) and in the system Miss Lick attempts to fight; the system where pretty women are unable to be anything else but wife and mother.

Ozeki paints a somewhat different picture of Jane. She has power over her own individual body, but she is still marked as different and is defined by others instead of fully being in power to define herself. Because she is half Japanese, half American and has certain masculine features people have difficulties defining her within a certain box, but still they attempt to do so. A man Jane encounters on her documentary mission states: “*What are you?*” He whined with frustration. And in a voice that was low, but shivering with demented pride, I told him, *‘I ... am ... fucking ... AMERICAN!’*” (11). I argue that Jane's main project is to

achieve acceptance for difference. Further, her larger project is the same as the one of feminist rhetoric, namely attempting to remove the concept of difference entirely in an all-inclusive project. But because others define her, Jane has less power than Miranda to reformulate her identity, and as a result, she attempts to do so using a male voice, instead of developing her own.

Looking at Miranda's and Jane's different ways of using rhetorical tools to change the societies in which they find themselves can point to an important aspect when it comes to power over female bodies and using a feminine voice. In Dunn's novel, it can be argued that women, to be able to use a feminine rhetoric, must be in power over their bodies in the first place. Using a feminine rhetoric presupposes having control over one's own body. Becoming a speaker of a feminine tongue therefore entails and in some ways presupposes, I would argue, being able to define your body as other than the stereotype and as different than what the masculine art attempts to manipulate it into being. I described this in the comment on Olympia's relative freedom. But, Ozeki proposes differently, I argue. Jane is not in complete power over either her body or how she is perceived by others, but still, throughout the course of the novel, she is able to define a feminine expression. This feminine type of expression is seen in her final documentary.

In my previous discussions, I have argued that Jane is part of a system where a masculine manipulative rhetoric defines women based on a narrow stereotypical femininity. Ozeki presents Jane as a victim of the power structures she is part of and at the same time attempts to fight, as she was born with twisted fallopian tubes caused by DES exposure when she was a foetus in her mother's womb. My point is that Jane's final documentary is a result of a growing awareness of how her body is both harmed and defined as other by the stereotypes that rule the culture in which she lives. As I discussed in chapter one, one of Jane's reasons for wanting to become a documentarian was that she wished to change how people perceive what is regarded as different. I argue that her wish to become a documentarian is based on the fact that she herself has been regarded as "different" by others. The man's comment about her nationality above underlines this. Wanting to use a new form of expression to change the definition of herself as "other" is central to Jane's aspiration to become a documentarian, I argue. What is crucial here is that Jane uses her status as different as a tool to do this. Her status is unique: "Being racially 'half's – neither here nor there – I was uniquely suited to the niche I was to occupy in the television industry...it seems I was more useful as a go-between, a cultural pimp" (9). Consequently, both Miranda and Jane are characters who are able to negotiate the worlds they live in, but their reasons to do so differ. Miranda draws because she

has the power to do so, she can draw naturally due to her bodily integrity. Jane, on the other hand, enters an expressive discourse because she is not fully present in either of the world's stereotypical definitions and wants to change the factors that define these. What is more important when considering these characters' status, is that the feminine rhetoric is given a new face in both the novels; it comes to life from the power of difference, not from the power of being accepted. A feminine rhetoric is therefore possible to attain both when women are empowered in the first place, and when they are not. Still, I propose that some sort of power must be present for women to be able to speak against stereotypes in their own voice.

As I discussed in chapter one, women and other minority group unite in their disordered bodies and use aspects related to their physical bodies to fight against the stereotypical images that exclude them. This forms what Shameem Black calls “the language of cosmopolitanism” (228), I argue. The language of cosmopolitanism is meant to “describe progressive and enabling responses to the dilemmas created by globalization. These responses attempt to avoid both the tyranny of imperialist knowledge and the silence of parochial retreat” (Black 228). According to Black, Ozeki's work looks to ways in which women can “develop usable alliances across national, racial, and sexual divides to combat the spread of global problems,” and that these alliances are the framework for “cosmofeminism” (228). In the following, I will discuss how this concept of cosmofeminism is widened when it comes to developing a feminine, descriptive rhetoric, in combination with unification through discourses, disorders and motherhood.

The turning point in Jane's role as a documentarian occurs when she meets Bunny Dunn, the former stripper. Jane, Bunny and Bunny's daughter Rose have all developed problems due to DES exposure. The women propose how it is possible to unite through having a disorder; the disorder provides a shared experience. Jane tells Bunny that she “‘had a kind of estrogen poisoning too. Different – I got it from my mother – but, well, it screwed me up inside.’ [...] ‘Come back tonight,’ [Bunny] said” (274). Because they share the same disorder, Bunny decides to tell her story in the documentary exposing the use of DES in cattle farming and how this affects the human body (274). What is interesting is that as a result of this shared experience, they are able to tell a story in their own words. Bunny and Jane are presented by Ozeki as having the same project; consequently they unite in a shared form of expression to tell their collective story. A unity caused by disordered bodies is in this way a unity which enables them to form rhetorical expressions. Although the two female characters have little power over why their bodies are disordered, they are still able to communicate a response to the issues that have affected them. As a result of the need to rectify what is done

against the disordered body, a feminine rhetoric becomes in some ways the inevitable and positive result. In this way, Ozeki provides a positive outlook on women's future ability to find a collective voice and using it to make themselves and others heard, through a collective power of disorders.

Furthermore, the revelation of the bleak backside concerning DES, hormones and the horrifying images of meat production, gains power when the effects are shown on physical bodies. Bodies and rhetorical tools stand together in a powerful combination in the process of revealing power structures that harm and shape female and disabled bodies. The physical body does not lie. Therefore, Ozeki's and Dunn's imagery concerning bodies affected by drugs and reproductive and sexual control, become the main symbolic and rhetorical tools in the general discussion at hand. Because "power must rest in the body," the harmful effects of male artistry are most efficiently shown on the disordered, female body. In this struggle, Miranda stands in the middle, having been able to redefine her body into not sexual and not disabled, but powerful. It is "a different approach to my tail...Now I think, in a way it's kind of marvelous" (33), Miranda states, opposing the male art of both Miss Lick and Olympia, who try to manipulate her. Through her art, she is able to give room for the bodily difference that many of the other characters in the two novels struggle against. Instead of fighting the difference, Miranda embraces it as part of *her* special difference, *her* individuality. The power of the body is therefore the power of expression through physical damage or otherness.

Kristine M. Baber and Katherine R. Allen "present women as active constructors of their own reality rather than merely as passive respondents to sociohistorical events and family socialisation" (5). Within the system of a feminine rhetoric, I argue that women can find their part in society as active constructors. By using tools they actively create themselves, women can define another system of power, a system in which they are powerful. Bunny Dunn and Jane do this, as they redefine themselves as active constructors of their own realities; they are active tellers of their own stories as described above. Miranda does so in reformulating the difference of her tail. Furthermore, being active constructors of one's own reality is strongly linked to how Akiko and Olympia are active participants in their own pregnancies. The difference between being passive respondents and active agents is therefore linked clearly, I propose, to reproductive abilities, bodies and telling one's own story, which are all-important factors in a project of redefining a feminine identity. In other words, disordered bodies unify women and form the basis for a common, feminine meeting point, a meeting point that rhetoric expressions can provide and strengthen.

Pearce notes this about African-American author hooks:

It is also no surprise that hooks discovers connections with her white, middle-class sisters; writers like Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson and Emily Bronte¹ with whom she is united in spirit of the creative imagination, and *in spite* of such profound material differences (55).

In other words, the rhetorical tools become meeting points for artistic women. At the same time, they also provide a disintegration of the social structures that alienate women from themselves and from each other. In the process of writing and speaking, women unite to reach their common larger goal, which is to write themselves into the world as individual, active authors of their own lives, despite material and physical differences.

Dunn presents this female unification in the house that Olympia, Miranda and Lily share after the Binewski show exploded. Although widely different from each other, the women live in a functional and viable co-existence. In similar terms, author Shōnagon, Jane and Akiko unite across the borders of time and space as they engage in Shōnagon's ancient diary. The book becomes a source of power and ideas for both Jane and Akiko, who use it, and attempt to mimic it, on their journey towards finding their individual types of expression. Art and writing becomes a common experience for women, an experience they define and set the parameters for themselves. Art and writing are forces that can both empower and lead to empowerment for women. This empowerment can enable them to reconceptualise a female identity. Shōnagon's book becomes the symbol of a textual unity, and the house becomes symbolic of how this textual unity becomes physical and viable.

Bunny Dunn's story is also important in the sense that she, through the power of the collective project with Jane, is able to change her life. Her story asserts the empowerment that can result from the unity of feminine artistic expression and rhetorical tools. Bunny's change and ability to tell her and Rose's story also breaks out of *My Year of Meat*'s border and enters the interpretation of *Geek Love*. Miss Lick wants to change women like Bunny Dunn; women who rely on their physique to marry well, believing that they are forever caught in their attractive bodies, and therefore can be nothing else than the wife of a man. The change Bunny is able to go through in her collective project with Jane points to the fact that women need not be dependent on men, even if they are attractive. What is more important, they need not depend on women like Miss Lick either. Miss Lick's theory of subjugation is proven wrong by Bunny's ability to change. From being a woman who was the foremost symbol of a woman who relied on, and defined herself on basis of, her physical assets, Bunny becomes a symbol

1 Pearce writes 'Brönte' with a regular 'o.'

of the woman who is able to break free from the stereotypical structures that have oppressed her. Her body is no longer manipulated by masculine art; rather it is redefined as powerful through the feminine descriptive discourse. The power of change lies in a collective storytelling and the ways in which she is able to voice her own concerns, both for herself and her young daughter:

'After you left the house last night I was thinkin' back, and I realized that I ain't never really ever made a single decision in my life, you know. Just kinda drifted from one thing to the next, following the direction these darn things pointed me in, you know?' She cupped her breasts in her hands and looked down at them ruefully. 'The pageants, the strip clubs, John ... On the whole, I've been darn lucky. But last night? Well, it was like I finally made a choice, talkin' for the camera, and it felt good. Like I was takin' a stand' (295).

Although some of the women that Miss Lick changes end up with careers and a good life, Dunn is still critical towards her character's actions. Ozeki presents in Bunny an antidote to Miss Lick's attempts to liberate women: the collective discussion concerning women's bodies. Bunny is, through the rhetorical unity with Jane, enabled to look beyond her physique and begin the journey to become a fully independent woman, capable of moving in another direction than where her breasts guide her. Importantly, this is done without physically changing her body. Consequently, confidence and self-respect are founded within the self, not projected on the outside, physical body as surgery and other literal changes to the body would have provided. Essentially, the individuality and security gained from a feminine rhetoric is internalised and therefore more persistent than an image of the self that is adjusted to masculine stereotypes and conventions based on physical assets.

As a result, a feminine artistic discourse can prove to be fruitful in other aspects than just giving women a voice. According to Pearce, female writers do not only write texts. Rather, she proposes, "both texts and persons are produced (only) through the repeated act of writing" (57). Bunny is able to recreate herself into a real person, not just breasts; Miranda is a complete human being when she is able to express herself; and Olympia recreates herself through her character on the radio, she is Miss McGurk, a woman with a voice. Being able to voice their individual needs in a feminine type of expression is therefore not only liberating the female characters from masculine stereotypes. Furthermore, a female rhetoric is constitutive for female individuality in general. Following from Pearce's argument above, I propose that the female characters in the two novels are not really human if they do not speak in a voice that is their own. By only repeating what is said by men, women cannot be complete individuals, instead they are shadows of the person they mimic. Through a feminine

rhetoric, the two authors attempt, I propose, to remove the reason for stigma in the cultural and discursive body of society, and in this way remove the disintegration of women who do not fit these stereotypes or who attempt to fight them but fail. Both authors present in this way feminine discourse as defining for a feminine, viable identity, both collective and individual.

Feminist Literature as Rhetorical Tools

I have argued that a feminine rhetorical expression is a possible road to a reconceptualisation of feminine identity because it does not attempt to define parameters for a gendered identity. Rather, instead of attempting to define a fluid truth, feminine art tries to describe subjectively what is present. Acknowledging that feminine art is subjective, it cannot and does not aim to set standards, and therefore can pictures rendered through feminine art include all types of gendered identities as opposed to stereotypical images of gender provided by masculine imagery. In art, Palumbo-Liu's and Chu's arguments that groups and subjects must define themselves through writing or discourses, gain validity and a concrete face. In the following, I will discuss how a feminine rhetoric stands in contrast to the defined, yet fluid, truth, that I proposed is present in chapter one of this thesis. In addition, I will point to Shameem Black's concept of cosmo-feminism, and how this concept is affected by aspects concerning motherhood that I discussed in chapter two of this thesis. In conclusion I will discuss how authors Dunn and Ozeki use a feminine expressive rhetoric in ways that show how feminist literature can take part in a general gender reconceptualisation.

I have proposed that disordered bodies can be powerful tools for a reconceptualisation of identities, but that a constructed truth was the barrier between the disordered bodies and the stereotypes that define them as disordered. In the beginning of *My Year of Meats*, Jane states that she “believed, honestly, that I could use wives to sell meat in the service of a “Larger Truth” (27). Jane is part of wanting to define a certain truth in her television shows, providing limiting images of women and motherhood. I propose that Jane's desire to describe a truth is based on her wanting to change the definition of “other,” therefore, she engages in the masculine forms of expression. In the same way, Elly uses truth as her brass knuckles and is part of the same structure, along with Miss Lick, Olympia and an array of other female characters in the two novels. Towards the end, however, Ozeki gives Jane another stance towards the definition of truth as a concept, and she says: “There's no denying, I thought. In the Year of Meats, truth wasn't stranger than fiction; it *was* fiction. Ma says I'm neither here nor there, and if that's the case, so be it. Half documentarian, half fabulist ... Maybe

sometimes you have to make things up, to tell truths that alter outcomes” (360). In this, Ozeki opens up the discussion concerning truth. At the same time, she gives room for the subjectivity that Dunn provides Miranda with to make her drawings, and the unity that Jane uses to tell her and Bunny's story in *My Year of Meats*. If truth is to be viable, it needs to be able to encompass all types of difference, as all “signification is an exclusion that points indirectly to what it excludes, and there are inevitably gaps or slippages between signifiers and what they signify” (DiQuinzio 2). DiQuinzio defines here the basis of the problem with a defined truth; it will never be able to encompass complete difference, because of the limitations of what the creator of a specific truth can signify.

Erevelles states that “Butler describes how gendered categories (we can replace gender by disability here) are themselves neither stable nor transcendental, but are in fact always constructed and reconstructed through historically specific discursive practices” (95). By commenting on Butler's argument, Erevelles sheds light on something that I argue both Dunn and Ozeki question in their novels: Can gender and disability even be seen as basic concepts for the creation of an identity, when gender and disability are fluid categories based on discursive practices? Defining human beings is, from this point of view, futile in itself, as all definitions are based on unstable stereotypes and normative images. In this milieu of never-ending relativity, both authors question, I argue, if anyone can truly be female or male, American or Japanese, disordered or healthy, freak or normal when the group constructs that surround these definitions are to such an extent based on relative constructs of individual realities. Both novels therefore try to envision, I propose, cultural systems where group definitions are not decisive for a person's identity. Although group identification can prove as a powerful tool for control, both authors call for individual definitions of human beings, where they are defined on the basis of who they are, instead of the group they are defined by others as belonging to.

The stories concerning Bunny Dunn, beef production and disorders in *My Year of Meats* underline the power of individuality over group constructs. “Apparently, the Bunny Dunn episode of *My American Wife!* was a celebration of the wholesomeness of beef, and the program aired the same day that the DES story broke” (358). Both the unwholesomeness of beef and the unwholesomeness of the treatment of the wives appear in the contrast between the two shows, making Jane's version of the truth more reliable and stable than that presented by the sponsored show, because she gives room for interpretation in her inclusion of the subjective view. The conflict between the two versions of the story is therefore also a conflict between masculine and feminine rhetorical tools. The core of the conflict is that the feminine

rhetoric, through its subjective view on the situation, reveals the ways in which the masculine rhetoric attempts to convey harmful realities as positive images. The feminine rhetoric looks beyond standard truths and presents subjective versions of the situation, whereas the masculine rhetoric argues for a glorified and unreal situation where nothing is perceived as harmful. Because the feminine rhetoric does not aim to set a standard or define a truth, it can also encompass subjective stories and views which shed light on different situations rather than defining them. The stories that are told are results of the harmful effects on individual, female bodies, rendering bodies and individuality at the core of a feminine rhetoric. These disorders are caused by a stereotype applied to a group: women. Therefore, a feminine rhetoric can encompass all kinds of subjective interpretations and truths, providing a multi-angled picture of a given situation. Furthermore, feminine rhetorical tools underline that reality is, and always will be, subjective and this is the concept that provides the feminine rhetoric with power.

JaneMaree Maher argues that there are “layers of identity, activity and meaning [...] contained within common conceptualizations of motherhood” (16), and these layers are all subjectively valid for each individual woman. I propose that the two novels I discuss in this thesis are closely bound by this concept of identity and motherhood, combined with the need for individual rhetorical tools. Because motherhood contains multiple layers of identity, the face of motherhood can also be the way in which the difference between women can best be shown. Ozeki presents her variety of women who choose differently when it comes to mothering and reproduction. What is interesting is that the female characters who are active decision makers when it comes to how and why they reproduce are most aware of their given situation and the effects of the choices they have made. Difference is therefore crucial in this context, because no given situation is similar to another, especially when it come the personal experience of reproduction. An active relationship with one's body provides power for the different, where the “different aspects” are the factors that make the subject individual. Paradoxically, when she uses her father's voice to reaffirm the stereotypes that bind her, Olympia underlines this. “Why would I want us to change into assembly-line items?” (282), she says. Dunn here underlines the dubiousness of her novel. In her satire she is able to both front critical views on limiting stereotypes, at the same time that she has given Olympia the aspiration to some day become truly individual. Here, I argue, Olympia states a concern which becomes valid for the establishment of the feminine rhetoric, in her embracing of difference as a founding concept of individuality.

Further, Maher argues that “placing motherhood at the centre of our critical focus

connects women's physical, affective, familial, and social experiences, but also reveals how these processes of globalization change, commodify and remake women's reproductive activities and relationships to care" (16). Maher's argument closely connects physical bodies with social experiences. Bodies are therefore, I propose, central in the concept of difference and subjectivity because difference is in many ways linked with physical experiences of either motherhood or disability and disorder. Both Dunn and Ozeki tie these concepts together in their novels, pointing to ways in which bodies are marked, either by reproduction or disability, and how these markings must be redefined based on individual truths and structures. "A hunchback is not agile enough for efficient skulking. But my voice can take me anywhere" (150), Olympia says about herself. Dunn here embodies in Olympia the voice which is necessary for the different body to be able to negotiate the social world that Maher presents in her argument. This voice is needed to become an active subject, instead of mere body. Feminine rhetoric, as it is presented by both Dunn and Ozeki, can be that inclusive discourse that looks to the complex individual for singular definitions. At the same time it can provide room for difference and subjectivity through theorising the embodied difference of individual bodies, as DiQuinzio argues for: "difference feminism intends to theorize the complexity of embodied, gendered subjectivity" (15). By opening up for a discourse based on subjective signification, not a fluid truth but "everdiminishing approximations" (Ozeki 176), a feminine rhetoric can open up for a discussion in which individual interpretations and understandings of the situation are not only allowed but welcomed.

In chapter two of this thesis I argued that reproduction stands at the centre of the definition of women as somehow both disabled and disordered, and that reproduction is therefore crucial to control, to either have power over female bodies or for women to empower themselves. Shameem Black argues that *My Year of Meats* unites women to "oppose challenges to their fertility, it seeks to extend the conceptual tactics of activism in order to shape an even more powerful political imaginary (227). In both novels, I propose, motherhood and unique experiences concerning reproduction become the ways in which disorder, disability, body power and stereotypes meet.

Jane states that "[m]y relationship with my body had been irrevocably altered by my failure to conceive" (Ozeki 158), underlining the close connection between disorder, reproduction and self-feeling. And when Elly sells hers and Iphy's virginity, Iphy has an important reaction: "Iphy lifted her eyes to me like the ghost of a murdered child. 'She just sold our cherry!' she cried. 'And I was *saving* mine!'" (203). Iphy symbolically dies because she has not had control over her sexuality and reproduction, foreshadowing their unwanted

pregnancy and eventual deaths towards the end of the novel. Body control is proven to be vital for the outcome of reproduction. At the same time, Akiko and Jane unite because of their struggles with reproduction, bodies and power: “Over the next three days, [Akiko] told me the whole sordid story of her marriage and her struggle with fertility. And I told her mine” (330). Reproduction, motherhood, sexuality and body control are therefore forces in both novels that at the same time can eradicate, empower and unite women. Dunn and Ozeki therefore point to reproduction and its impact on bodies as vital for a feminine rhetoric, and in their novels, they both take part in writing this rhetoric.

Black argues that *My Year of Meats* “suggests a powerful role for feminist writing in an era of globalization” (230). What Black also points to is an enhancement of the unification of women through the experience of motherhood. Either as mothers or not, women unite in that they can or cannot have children, both experiences contributing to the unique experience that I described in chapter two of this thesis. The authors' attempts to envision how feminist literature and other artistic forms of expression can illuminate and discuss issues that are at hand in today's global and transnational society. These issues encompass reproductive rights and questions concerning gender and identity. This also highlights how literature itself can contribute to, or open up a discussion concerning identities.

Based on these arguments, I propose that Dunn and Ozeki both take part in a feminist literature which looks to motherhood as important for a feminine rhetoric. Motherhood is not necessarily limiting for women, as earlier feminists have argued. Rather, the prevailing stereotype that women are naturally wives and mothers is. I argue, that at the basis for the feminist project that both Dunn and Ozeki engage in is the belief that motherhood can provide a unique, feminine experience, an experience all women can engage in no matter their culture, social status or disability. The physicality of motherhood and the physicality of not being mother, at each end of the spectre, are therefore combined in a common, feminine, describing discourse. At the face of motherhood, women can also stand together and work against structures that still oppress and subjugate women. Motherhood and violence is a strong combination to which women can connect, and Dunn and Ozeki take part in a discussion concerning these issues in their narratives. Bordo argues that the body “is a medium of culture” (165), and I propose that this is why the body is such a powerful force for both gaining control and remaining in control in the two novels. Motherhood becomes in this sense the ways in which either the masculine or the feminine culture and rhetoric is inscribed upon the female characters' bodies. In presenting female characters who struggle with bodies and

motherhood, both Dunn and Ozeki envision how cultures affect the female body. At the same time, the reactions, struggles and disorders that the female characters suffer from because of the inscription of pregnancies controlled by men become symbolic of this limiting and subjugating rhetoric. In the two novels, the body in combination with motherhood is therefore the unity which elucidates the power structures in the prevailing cultures. At the same time, the body becomes a locus for control and redefining identities and individual experiences, especially in the context of reproduction. Bodies and reproduction are twofold concepts, as they can both be controlled and be used to gain control over the individual who inhabits the body. Dunn and Ozeki presents female characters who attempt the move from “docile bodies” (Bordo 165) to active bodies by using rhetorical tools. The authors envision this journey to take place in actively taking control over reproductive abilities, and through this, actively engaging in an individual voice, aided by a positive group affiliation which welcomes difference; Black's notion of cosmo-feminism.

What is interesting about the two novels is that they provide a feminine rhetoric, both in power of the texts themselves and in power of the female characters in the novels. The novels become meta-commentaries on the characters that act within them, commenting and critiquing the different choices the female characters take in their journey to create and stabilise individual identities. As female authors writing about female characters' attempt of redefining themselves as individuals, both Dunn and Ozeki contribute their satirical outlook on the discourses in American society as a way to make women's voices heard and acknowledged. They focus on matters concerning disability, disorder and motherhood as crucial both for the reconceptualisation of bodies, and for the discussion itself to function. Having power over one's body is crucial for having a voice; consequently, these matters are vital for women to discuss. At the same time, the authors address meeting points where these matters are vital for developing a feminist rhetoric in itself.

Within contemporary, American, feminist literature, both Dunn and Ozeki define their own place, a place where not only matters concerning women are discussed. Rather, the authors encompass how other groups are defined and stereotyped according to the group to which they are seen to belong, pointing to concepts that look beyond women and motherhood and into a rhetoric of acceptance. As feminine discourse can encompass other differences, the authors' discussion goes beyond physical reality and steps into a more open discourse: A discourse where definitions of personhood are based on identity not body, which will prove to be crucial for people oppressed by gender, disability or race prejudice. The concept “freakish”

is changed towards being a part of a person's individuality, and redefined as identity instead of "other." A feminine discourse can therefore be argued to encompass not only women, but also people with disabilities, and other people who do not meet the requirements of the generally accepted norm, created by masculine manipulative art. By looking to a rhetoric that is descriptive, both novels engage in a discussion concerning the values of human beings and how these values are defined. As a result, both authors question the reality of the cultural world that surrounds individuals. By presenting characters that both trust and doubt these given realities, both authors critique a structure: the structure that within societies it is easy to simply agree and not question. Questioning bodies and motherhood and how these concepts affect their female characters becomes an important issue in both novels, and can be seen to form the basis of the feminist discourses they provide. In a constant game of trying to provide answers, given realities and truths will in the end prove themselves as futile and relative, all depending on who tells the stories, and who reads them.

Conclusion

The Rhetorical Freak

I've conquered them. They thought to use and shame me but I win out of nature, because a true freak cannot be made. A true freak must be born (Dunn 20).

As a coordinator for television, I know that false exoticism is my trade. It's what sells meat (Ozeki 365).

In the introduction I asked the question: is it possible for the female characters in the two novels to become healthy, female, complete individuals in power of themselves? Further, I questioned whether or not the female characters are actually active agents of change, or if they fail in their liberationist projects. How and if the female protagonists become active agents has proven to be crucial for their destinies in the two novels that I have discussed in this thesis. Being an active participant in social life, having active rights over one's own body and being active in making one's own decisions have been points of struggle for all the female characters. I have questioned the ways in which the body is a locus of power and control, and investigated how the female characters react and adjust to being controlled by forces they have no say in defining. As they are crucial to these struggles, the themes of disability, motherhood and rhetorical voice are central to these very different, yet thematically similar novels. The combining force for the themes is the human body, which becomes central for both defining and inscribing norms in society, and for gaining and staying in power over these normative images once they are reaffirmed by human bodies and identities. The title of this thesis is "Power must rest in the body." For both authors, bodies are important for feminine identity, and therefore, having power over one's body equals having power over one's identity. The novels underline this by presenting female characters that are not always in power of their bodies, and in showing the effects of this.

Using contemporary American culture as their background, the two authors investigate, through their fiction, cultural structures that limit and define women's role as belonging to a certain sphere. Concepts of essential motherhood, patriarchal family control, capitalism and disability are all up for scrutiny by what I propose are two highly critical authors. In comparing and contrasting these novels, I have opened up for a discussion that goes beyond fiction, and into social critique. Dunn's satire and Ozeki's docu-fiction highlight dysfunctional forces and structures in contemporary American society. These dysfunctional

structures do not only apply to the female characters within the novels. Rather, I propose that the ways in which normative images and stereotypes are created in the texts, although exaggerated for critical effect, are in many ways valid for actual human beings in American society. Power over bodies is of great importance in American culture in general, not only in these two fictional worlds.

My first claim in this thesis was that stereotypes and norms are strongly connected to aspects related to capitalist production, marketing and economic incentives. Both novels describe worlds that circle around financial gain as the main goal for the male characters. As a result, capitalist production becomes the crucible where bodies, disability and norms meet. Stereotypes are crucial for financial control, and these stereotypes easily render some people as disabled. In this setting disability, I have argued, becomes a wide-ranging term, encompassing all those who are unable to fully partake in capitalist production. Caused by the limiting world of stereotypes, women are also rendered somewhat disabled, because of a focus on “housewifization,” which urges women to stay at home with their children. Women are therefore, in the two novels, left out of the realm of production, due to cultural norms and standards. Various forms of disorders are another impact of the limiting stereotypes that rule the narratives. Disorders vary from hormone poisoning, eating disorders and general disintegration.

Dunn's satire provides a bleak outlook on how the general society defines and groups people, underlining that cultures use group definitions as a way to assert power over others. I proposed that the two novels move, in power of their narratives, from fiction into social critique. I have investigated the theories of scholars who work with social matters in their writing, and Dunn and Ozeki both portray characters who struggle with the same issues that are presented in both the disability theories, the feminist writings and rhetorical theories I have used in this thesis. Contemporary America is therefore connected to the themes that are up for discussion in the two novels, and this society is mirrored and satirised in the fiction the authors present.

Catherine Wynne argues that carnival “celebrates [a] display of excess, licensing that which is normally controlled” (156). The female body is the locus for control in both novels, where the male powers attempt to oppress the grotesque woman, the woman connected to the mortal, to meat and decay through her ability to physically give birth to children. In becoming utterly grotesque, the complete opposite of the standard, the female characters are nonetheless able to question the ways in which they are defined, as Michael Hardin proposes. Their grotesque appearance becomes *their* carnival, which offers a critique of and reveals the fluid

and relative nature of stereotypes, giving the female characters room to reformulate their own identities. Olympia's statement in the quote above underlines this; her body is powerful, when she embraces it as it is. The ones who try to shame her attempt to impose their definitions on her, marking her as deviant and different, but she wins still, trusting her own grotesque body. The grotesque is redefined as a positive force, giving room for subjective definitions of what can be incorporated into an individual identity. In the two novels, women acquire the disgusting to make themselves different. By remaking themselves as completely deviant, the female characters find in some ways a way of redefining the structure around them, I have proposed. Otherness becomes a celebrated force, but that otherness must be so different that it causes a change in the prevailing systems. "The other" must be completely grotesque to acquire the power to change stereotypes and norms and how these are created. In this, the authors look to society's obsession with the perfect, in people's attempts of becoming the standardised norm through different body treatments and forms of manipulation. The characters in the novels that undergo treatments like this and suffer as a result underline the futility of attempting to become the normative standard, in fiction as well as in real life.

Susan Bordo argues in her book *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* that stereotypes are limiting structures for women in America. Scrutinising the concepts of jurisdiction and social judgement, Bordo presents the pregnant woman as the closest a human body can come to being "mere body," a foetal incubator. The processes she describes are mostly ruled by men, relatives and family of the pregnant woman, and male judges, who limit the choices and power in women when they are faced with aspects concerning their reproductive abilities. In similar terms are the women in the novels affected by these structures, where men and other forces interfere with the female, reproductive body.

At the same time, motherhood is the core of the concept of otherness described above, because motherhood offers a unique experience for women (Young quoted in Bordo 96). Motherhood is therefore a concept which can be totally removed from the realm of stereotypical forces, because it will always offer a unique and individual experience for women. However, the female characters in the novels meet, when faced with motherhood, entirely subjugating, limiting and reducing situations. The stereotypes that make the female reproductive body as "mere body," as described by Susan Bordo are mirrored in the two novels, underlining the potential harmful and destroying aspects of lacking body control. The fictions underline, in their extreme portrayals of female destinies, that women and motherhood is a central locus of control, at the same time as the experience of motherhood can be limiting for women in contemporary society. In the face of reproduction, women can

risk losing their subjectivity, both in the novels and in society in general, due to reproductive technologies, as well as cultural norms and rules that apply to reproduction.

How stereotypes are created, and their connection to marketing, has been investigated, by the authors on one level, and in my discussion at another. Stereotypes and norms prove to be relative and subjective, formed on the basis of the stories and marketing needs. Narration and story telling, rhetorical tools and media images are therefore crucial in creating the given stereotypes. The characters in the two novels trust the stereotypes to a certain extent, conforming to their limiting rules, without questioning how and why the stereotypes are created. In this landscape, truths become impossible to define, as they will always be marked by someone's meaning and concerns. The authors voice critical concern when it comes to how some of the female characters adopt these stereotypes and incorporate them as their own reality. One of the main arguments in my thesis is that, through the authors' scepticism towards their own characters' conduct, they offer a solution through the power of the grotesque, female, reproductive body. In being deviant from a given truth, the women can paradoxically gain power from what is arguably the reason for their subjugation. The authors' social critique is fronted in this scepticism. Through their satire and irony, both authors point sceptical fingers, in the descriptions of their characters' actions and thoughts, to how actual human beings in contemporary society shape and mould their lives to fit in with given stereotypes and fluid truths: Fluid truths that in the end are shaped and created by fictions. As Jane is quoted in the beginning of this conclusion; the exotic must in many ways be made, for it to catch interest. The exotic is therefore also always defined on the basis of a given construct of what is true, strange or fake.

David Palumbo-Liu argues that rhetorical tools are all-important for minor groups to be heard and acknowledged as complete human beings (43), and in these novels, voice become all-important. What is more interesting is that both novels find their place as rhetorical tools within contemporary America. The inclusive and descriptive rhetoric that both novels call for is therefore written in the novels themselves. However, they are still relative and fictional, underlined by the fact that the novels are fiction, and do not profess to be anything else. The authors question their own rhetoric, I propose, in being critical and questioning towards their characters. Many of them are allowed to do things that are regarded with scepticism and distrust by the voice behind the fictional narrators. The critique towards Jane, Olympia and Miss Lick provides the best examples of this. Therefore, the worlds that are formed through the authors' rhetorics are also fluid and cannot provide truths about cultures and stereotypes. Redefining stereotypes and cultural norms through fictions and

rhetorical tools will prove difficult, even though they can open up a discussion concerning these issues. Definitions are central to human lives, yet at the same time, they can impose violence. Hence, definitions are very powerful, both in how they are created and how they are applied.

Louis Theroux poses a question in his documentary “America's Medicated Kids” (seen on <http://www.nrk.no/nett-tv/klipp/707907/> Feb 2, 2011): What is a symptom of psychological disorder, and what is a personality trait? In questioning this, Theroux underlines the fluidity and the strangeness of rhetorical tools, and also the questionable nature of definitions that are applied to human beings. By naming someone as something, a person will always execute some sort of power over the person who is being named both in the definition itself and through the rhetoric that defines. Consequently, a focus on individuality is therefore crucial, as my discussion of the two novels has underlined. However, the relativity that a focus on only individuality provides can still prove futile in the context of rhetorical tools and power.

What is interesting about the projects Dunn and Ozeki have written, and which they have given their characters to take part in, is that it can be argued that the feminine rhetoric moves even further than just including women. Because the key to the feminine rhetoric is that it is inclusive and welcoming of difference, it can actually encompass all kinds of people, also the male characters in the novels, and other people who may have the goal of limiting the women who have created the rhetoric. Along the same lines as with the possible dangers that lie in a reconceptualisation through disordered bodies and reproduction, that is, the danger that the body can succumb to the forces it escapes, the feminine rhetoric can also succumb by being too inclusive. In taking in aspects that contest it, feminist literature and the feminist rhetoric can lose the idea of itself, becoming less inclusive, in an eternal game of redefining norms, cultures and social rules. My greatest point of critique of the feminist projects in question is therefore this endless relativity of fluid truths and definitions. Although seemingly positive, not setting standards can also prove as futile as trying to live within them.

Nevertheless, both authors are in some ways aware of this, and I propose that this can be the reason why Olympia dies, and why Jane in the end does not find answers to her questions. Olympia's final words to her daughter are in a letter that pinpoints this dubiousness. The letter questions how Miranda will interpret her story, marking the words as relative. Olympia leaves Miranda a trunk, where she will find “all the record there is of my history and yours. [...] I can't be sure what the trunk will mean to you, or the news that you aren't alone, that you are one of us” (347). Jane also reveals her uncertainty with the written word: “I don't think I can change my future simply by writing a happy ending. That's too easy and not so interesting. I

will certainly do my best to imagine one, but in reality I will just have to wait and see” (361). The act of writing is contested, in that the feminine rhetoric will not be able to provide truth and security, even though, I argue, it professes to do so. The novels therefore stand as alone as these two quotes do, yet at the same time, they are powerfully part of a larger world of feminist literature. The fiction gains power from not defining itself as true, at the same time, this is also the source of its weakness.

In these two novels, strangely similar, yet amazingly different from each other, truth is relative and textual images are not to be trusted. Both positive and negative in their relativity, the novels nevertheless open up for subjective interpretation, arguing, I propose, that true individuality and subjectivity are the only factors a female human body can trust to become fully herself. What forms the basis of both *My Year of Meats* and *Geek Love* is therefore the ways in which individuality and personality is crucial for the development of people as complete human beings. The main social critique embedded in the novels is that the contemporary cultural discourse urges consumers to trust these mediated, potential harmful images as given truths.

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